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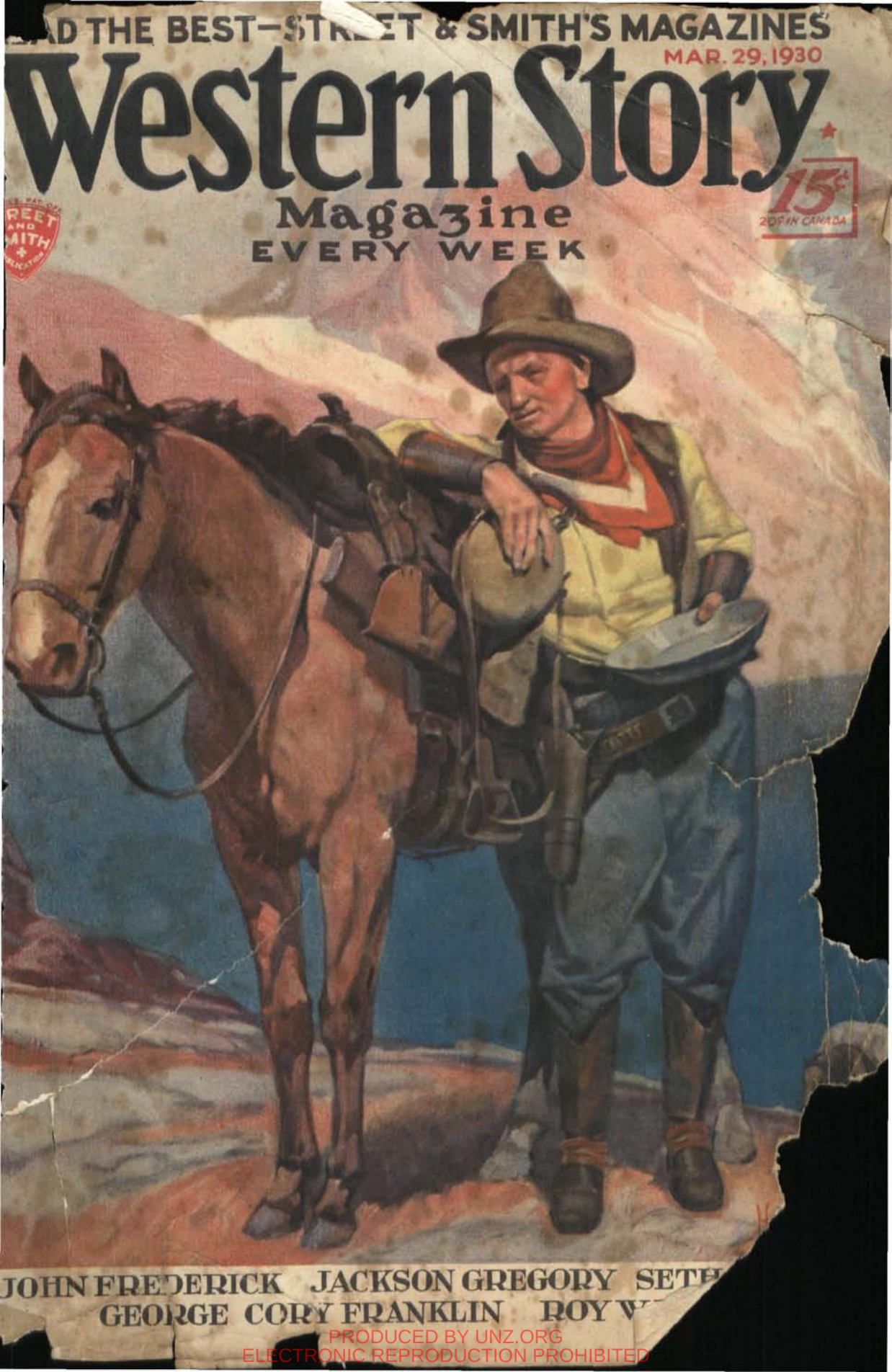

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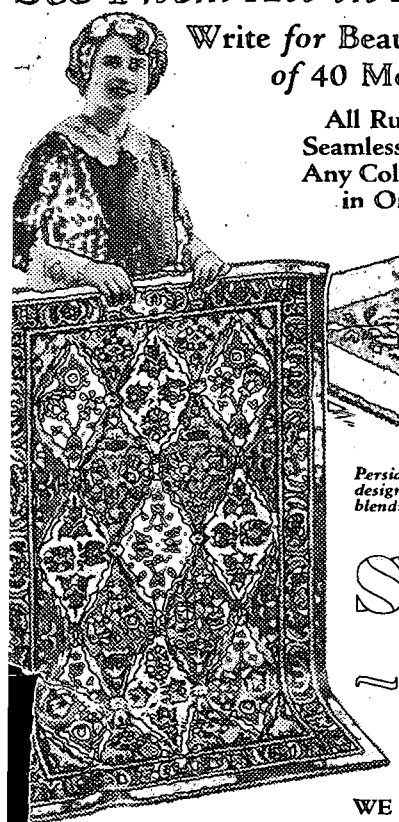

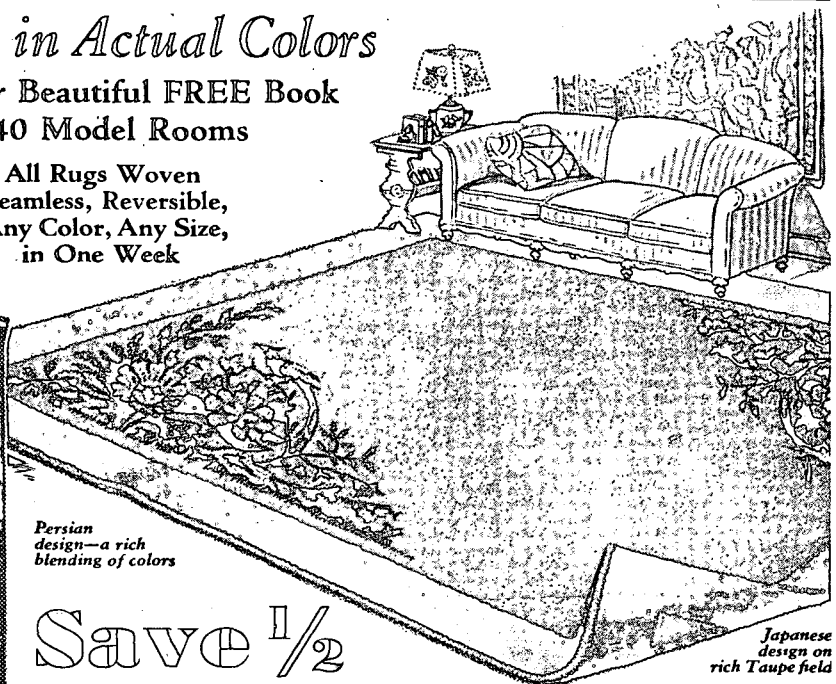

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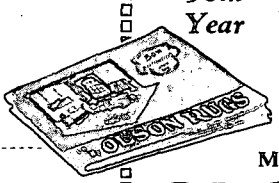

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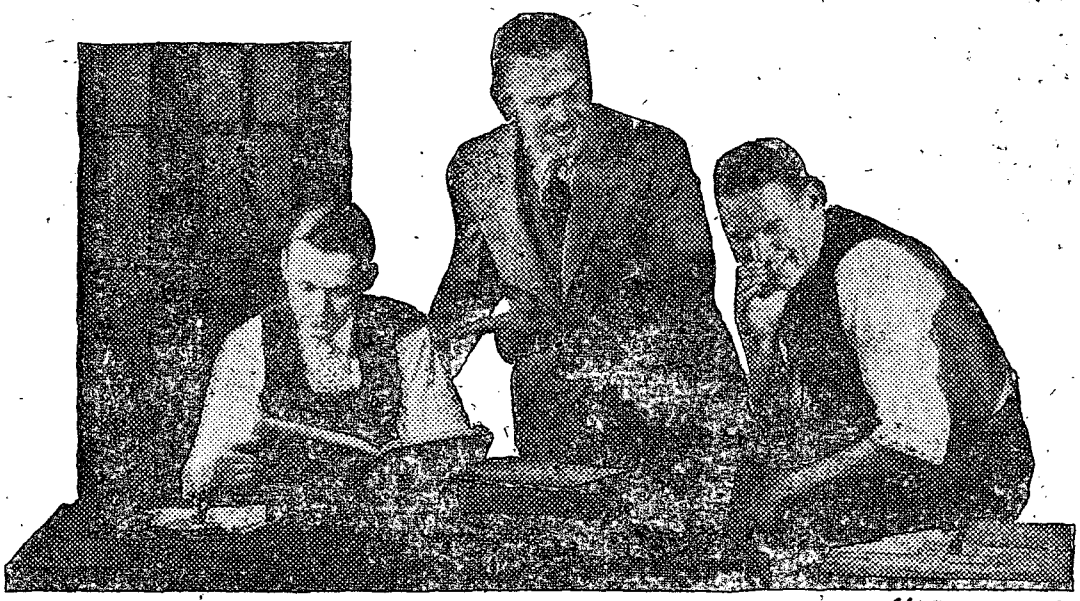

They Told Him Salesmen Were "Born"

But Now He Makes $10,000 a Year ...Thanks to This Little Book

IT was just a little free book that made the difference between Ed Pinkham and the rest of the men in our shop. Nobody ever imagined that Ed would land, even in the $5,000-a-year class, let alone be making $10,000 before he was thirty. Ed didn't know himself the abilities he had in him as a money-maker.

But one day, a strange occurrence changed his whole life. During his lunch hour Ed started to read a little book he had brought to work with him.

"It's a book called 'The Key To Master Salesmanship,' Bill," he told me. "It's the most amazing thing I ever read. I never dreamed there was so much in salesmanship. You ought to send for a copy yourself. It's free."

"Huh!" said Luke Jones. "Does that book tell you how to become a salesman?"

"It sure does," replied Ed, enthusiastically.

"Don't waste your time," advised Luke. "You can't learn how to be a salesman. A fellow has to be 'born' that way to be a good salesman."

Ed just smiled at that, but he said nothing. Soon afterward he quit the shop, and we forgot about him. And then last night, I met Ed again—driving a snappy new sedan and dressed like a million dollars.

"For Pete's sake," I said. "What are you doing nowadays, Ed?" He smiled. "City sales manager for the Steel Castings Company," he told me. "What are you doing?"

"Still at the shop," I replied. "But what I want to know is, how do you come to be sales manager for Steel Castings? They're one of the biggest firms in the business."

Ed smiled again. "Remember that book on Salesmanship that Luke Jones was kidding me about one day? Well, when I finished my Salesmanship training the Association I took it from gave me a choice of twenty-one jobs through their Free Employment Department, and I took a position as salesman for Steel Castings Company. They made me City Sales Manager three months ago at ten thousand dollars a year."

"Good night!" I said. "And Luke and I are still punching the old time clock."

Ed looked at me seriously. "See here, Bill," he said. "Are you sport enough to risk two cents that you can do as well as I did? Then spend the two cents to write to the National Salesmen's Training Association tonight and get their free book. Then take their course. When you have your diploma, their Free Employment Department will help you get a good sales job—every year they have calls for over 50,000 salesmen. Not only will they help you get the job, but they give you an iron-clad money-back guarantee that you must be satisfied with the training received—or they refund your tuition!"

FREE—TO EVERY MAN

A book—but what a book! Just seven ounces of paper and printer's ink—but it reveals facts and secrets that have led hundreds of men to success beyond their fondest expectations! See for yourself—FREE—why "The Key To Master Salesmanship" has increased the earning capacities of thousands, as a direct result of their reading it! You'll know then, how J. H. Huppert of Michigan, learned from its pages the secrets that enabled him to make $525 in one week. You can understand how it helped A. A. Fidler of Alabama to raise his pay 700%. Learn for yourself the REAL TRUTH about salesmanship. You do not risk one penny or incur the slightest obligation. And since it may prove the turning point in your career it is certainly worth your while to fill out and mail the coupon below. Do it now!

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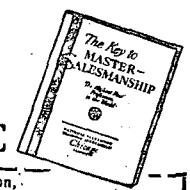

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Without cost or obligation please send me my free copy of "The Key To Master Salesmanship," including details of your FREE EMPLOYMENT Service.

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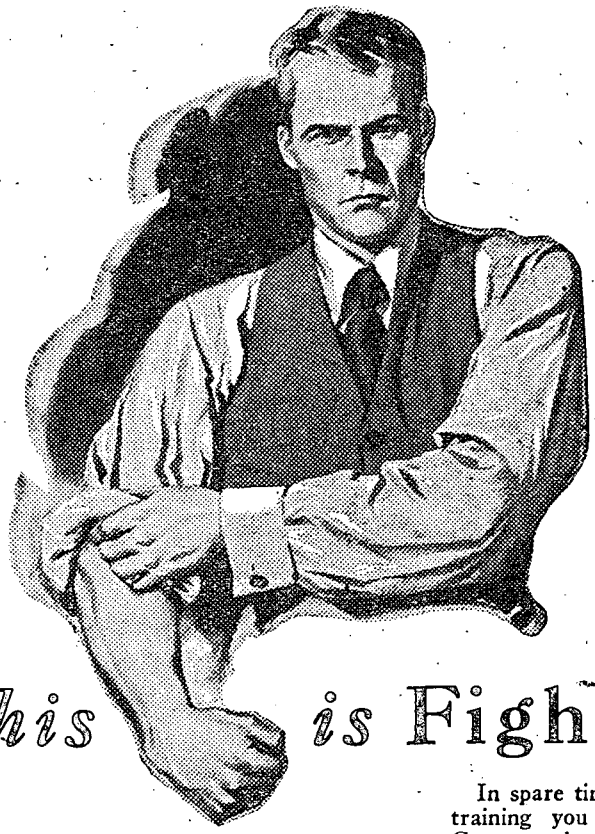

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IF YOU'RE a quitter you won't read far in this advertisement. If you're not—if you have the courage to face facts—you want to know who is responsible for your not getting ahead faster. We'll tell you. It's YOU. The man who won't be licked *can't* be licked. If you're a drifter you'll always wish for success but never do anything about it. The earth is cluttered with that kind.

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The difference may be in the size, the shape, or even in the notches. So, STUDY EACH KEY CAREFULLY and if you find the **"ONE"** key that is different from all the others, SEND THE NUMBER OF IT with your name and address TO ME AT ONCE on a post card or in a letter. You may become the winner of a $2,000.00 Special Buick Sedan and $1750.00 cash extra, or $3750.00 all in cash—without one cent of cost to you.

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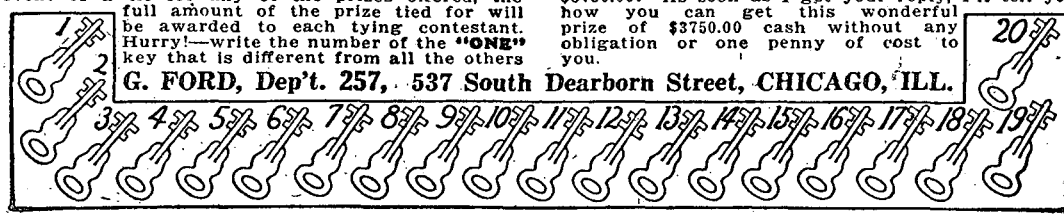

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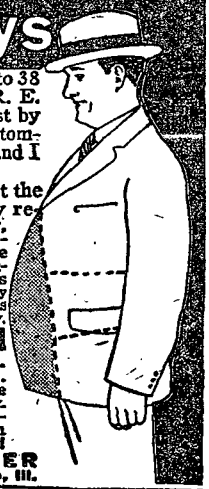

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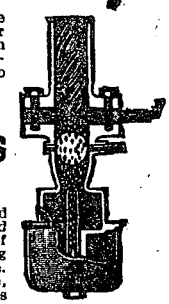

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"They Snickered When I Got Up To Speak"

—But from the First Word, I Held Them Spellbound

THE banquet hall was crowded. Suddenly I heard the chairman's voice say—"We will now have a few words from Mr. Byron Munn." It came like a flash of lightning! He was unexpectedly calling on *me* for a speech!

As I started to get up, I heard a titter run around the table.

"Watch him make a fool of himself," I overheard someone whisper. "He's so bashful he's afraid of his own voice."

I knew they were expecting me to make myself ridiculous, but I only grinned inside.

I stood squarely on my two feet and started in!

"But When I Commenced to Speak"—

Almost from the first word, the smiles of doubt and derision faded from their faces. They were incredulous—amazed! Instantly the atmosphere became so tense that you could have heard a pin drop! No snickers nor sneers *now!* My voice, clear as a bell—strong, forceful, unfaltering—rang out through the banquet hall as I hammered home each point of my message with telling strokes! I let myself go—soaring to a smashing finale that almost brought them to their feet!

When I finished there was an instant of dead silence! And then it came—a deafening wave of applause rolling up from one hundred pairs of hands—spontaneous, excited, thrilling!

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How to talk before your club or lodge.
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How to converse interestingly.
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How to train your memory.
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How to be the master of any situation.

Was Once a "Human Clam"

After it was all over, Jack Hartray fell into step beside me as I left the hall. "Gee, that was a great speech!" he said enthusiastically. "You certainly raised yourself about 100% in the eyes of every person in that place tonight. . . . And yet they used to call you 'a human clam'—and the quietest man in the office!"

It was true, too. All my life I *had* been handicapped with a shy, timid and retiring nature. With only a limited education, I never could express my ideas in a coherent, forceful way. As a result I saw dozens of men with less ability pass me by simply because they were good talkers and knew how to create the right impression. It was maddening.

A Lucky Accident

At last I accidentally ran across a little book entitled, *How to Work Wonders with Words.* Between its covers I discovered certain facts and secrets I had never dreamed of. Difficulties were swept away as I found a simple way to overcome timidity, stage-fright and self-consciousness—and how to win advancement, popularity and success.

Today I hold the sort of position that I had always envied. My salary has been increased! I am not only in constant demand as a speaker in public but I am asked to more social affairs than I have time to attend. To sum it all up, I am meeting worth-while people, earning more than I ever dared expect and enjoying life to the fullest possible degree! And furthermore, the *sheer power of convincing speech* has been the big secret of my success!

The experience of Byron Munn is typical. Not only men who have made millions, but thousands of others have found success after learning the secrets of powerful, effective speech. Being able to say the right thing in the right way at the right time has perhaps been responsible for more brilliant success than any other one thing under the sun!

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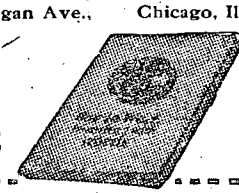

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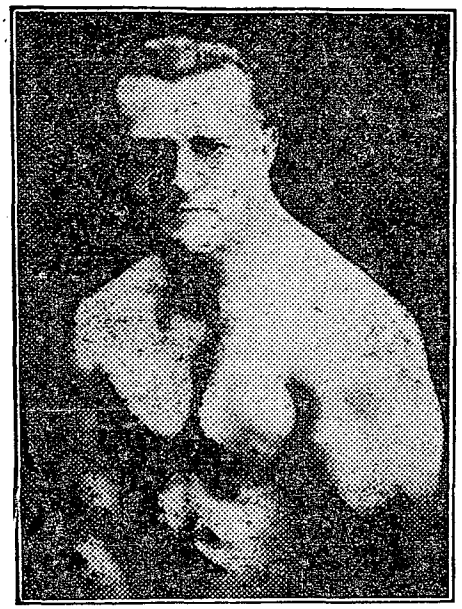

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SAVED

Thank your lucky stars you have another man inside of you. He's the human dynamo. He fills you full of pep and ambition. He keeps you alive—on fire. He urges you on in your daily tasks. He makes you strive for bigger and better things to do. He makes you crave for life and strength. He teaches you that the weak fall by the wayside, but the strong succeed. He shows you that exercise builds live tissue—live tissue is muscle—muscle means strength—strength is power. Power brings success! That's what you want, and gosh darn your old hide you're going to get it!

WHICH MAN WILL IT BE?

It's up to you. Set your own future. You want to be the Human Dynamo? Fine! Well, let's get busy. That's where I come in. That's my job. Here's what I'll do for you:

In just 30 days I'll increase your arm one full inch with real live, animated muscle. Yes, and I'll add two inches to your chest in the same time. Pretty good, eh? That's nothing. Now come the works. I'll build up your shoulders. I'll deepen your chest. I'll strengthen your whole body. I'll give you arms and legs like pillars. I'll literally pack muscles up your stomach and down your back. Meanwhile I'll work on those inner muscles surrounding your vital organs. You'll feel the thrill of life shooting up your old backbone and throughout your entire system. You'll feel so full of life you will shout to the world, "I'm a man and I can prove it!"

Sounds good, what? But listen! That isn't all. I'm not just promising these things. **I guarantee them.** It's a sure bet. Oh, boy! Let's ride.

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Catalogue FREE — **New Model Boiler**

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Made of EXTRA STRONG, heavy pure copper, with a 5-inch Solid Brass Cap and Spout. Easily cleaned. No Screw cap, no threads to get out of order. No burning of hands no trouble in taking off cover. Cap can be put on or taken off in a second by a simple twist of the thumb-screw on the top. Safe, practical, simple and durable. No article of such quality and utility ever sold at such low price. It's a low pressure boiler and pasteurizer. An ideal cooker for the home. Nothing better for general usages. It lasts a lifetime and gives real service and satisfaction.

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IT'S *fun*

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Learning to play your favorite instrument this "no-teacher" way—*takes only a few months!*

ALL your life you've wanted to play a musical instrument. And now at last you can realize your ambition! Just choose your favorite instrument—the piano, the violin, the saxophone, whatever it may be—and then let the U. S. School of Music prove that you can learn to play it in an amazingly short time—*right in your own home—and without any private teacher.*

Mail the coupon NOW—and you will immediately receive an interesting Free booklet that tells you all about this wonderful new system—which has already taught over one-half million students to play their favorite musical instrument.

Musical Talent Not Needed

Even if you have never touched an instrument before you can't go wrong this amazingly easy way. For every step, from beginning to end, is right before your eyes in print and picture. You always know what to do and how to do it. No guess work. No delays. If you make a mistake you correct it yourself and continue. The whole course is as simple as A, B, C—and any child will tell you that studying the music this new way is even easier than learning to read.

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Guitar	Harmony and Composition
Saxophone	Automatic Finger Control
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You'll be surprised to see how music will give you a greater joy and interest in life. It will enlarge your circle of friends—and will attract many new admirers. If you can play a musical instrument you will never feel "alone in a crowd". For as you dash off the latest song hit—or play some lovely melody from a well-known classic—you will always be in demand—you can't help being popular.

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If you are in earnest about wanting to join the crowd of entertainers and be a "big hit" at any party—if you really do want to play your favorite instrument, or become a professional performer whose services will be in demand for band and orchestra work, as a stage or radio artist—fill out and mail the convenient coupon asking for our Free Booklet and Free Demonstration Lesson. These explain our wonderful method fully and show you how easily and quickly you can learn to play at little expense. The booklet will also tell you all about the amazing new *Automatic Finger Control.* Instruments are supplied when needed—cash or credit. U. S. School of Music, 3593 Brunswick Bldg., New York City.

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Please send me your free book, "Music Lessons in Your Own Home," with introduction by Dr. Frank Crane, Free Demonstration Lesson and particulars of your easy payment plan. I am interested in the following course:

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Have you above instrument?.....

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Win $3,500.00

Prizes from $1800.00 to $4245.00 each have been won through our unique advertising plan. In our last, an old man of 69, out of work, won over $5000.00. A boy, only 15, won $900.00. In next 3 or 4 months thousands of dollars will be awarded to fortunate persons who solve our puzzles and win our prizes.

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Watch out! These twelve pictures of a famous woman flyer all look alike—BUT—two, and only two, are exactly alike. **Find these twin flyers!** Some pictures are different in the collar, helmet, goggles, or tie. Remember, only two of the twelve are exactly alike. Find them, and send the numbers of the twin flyers on a post card or letter today. If correct, your answer will qualify you for this opportunity.

$7160.00 IN PRIZES GIVEN THIS TIME

Over 25 prizes, and duplicate prizes in case of ties. It's up to the winner whether he or she chooses $2875.00 in cash or a new Waco airplane, a big automobile, or a new home. A gorgeous prize list! ANYONE WHO ANSWERS THIS PUZZLE CORRECTLY MAY RECEIVE PRIZES OR CASH.

$625.00 ADDITIONAL FOR PROMPTNESS

Be prompt! It pays. Find the real twin flyers, and I will send Certificate which will be good for $625.00 if you are prompt and win first prize. Imagine, a first prize of $3500.00!

NO MORE PUZZLES TO SOLVE. Any man, woman, boy, or girl in the U. S. A.—anyone at all, except residents of Chicago, Illinois, and former major prize winners. 25 of the people who take up this offer are going to win these wonderful prizes. Be one of them. Send the numbers of the twin flyers. Send no money, but be prompt.

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Sirs: Rush to me without charge copy of 32-page book, "How to get U. S. Government Jobs," list of positions obtainable and full particulars telling how to get them.

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Ohio Man Discovers "Crazy" Way to Make Money Quick

Just Say 20 Magic Words to 10 Ladies a Day and I Pay You Cash For It

Here's without question the strangest yet easiest way we know of for honest men and women to make money in full or spare time. Just say 20 magic words to 10 ladies—and this million-dollar manufacturing company actually pays you cash. You don't need to sell a single thing. You don't even need one minute's sales experience. This is the latest and by far the greatest of all the sensational money-making offers of this famous leader—C. W. Van De Mark—the sales wizard who has already put more than 25,000 men and women on the road to prosperity. Again Van has proven his fearlessness! Again Van has come to the front for the workers of America. "Conservative" business leaders called Van "crazy" for making this radical cash pay agreement. They said it would ruin "conservative" traditions—upset "sane" business principles. Cooler heads called it the masterly stroke of America's master sales genius and declared it would prove itself one of the greatest of all prosperity boosters.

Get Van's Cash Agreement
I show you how to end your money worries. Just tell me how much you want—
$10.00 in a Day Full Time
$2.00 in an Hour Spare Time
and I will gladly send you my Written Agreement, legal and binding upon me. The more time you devote to this position the more money you get.
VAN

A $25,000.00 Bond Backs Our Guarantee

No Need to Sell Anything
To Get This Cash Pay

But now Van himself reveals the sensational truth. "Sudden overwhelming demand for our products is the reason"—says Van. Countless housewives suddenly learned through our recent nation-wide announcements that we can make amazing savings on household bills. So literally overnight the demand for our products has expanded almost to the "bursting" point. Now we must hurry and employ 1100 more local men and women to take care of regular customers. Time must not be wasted! Expense must not be considered! Orders must be filled quick! Customers must not be kept waiting! Big money for our representatives means nothing to us from now on! So I have smashed the so-called "conservative" business traditions—I now offer every honest man and woman a steady position and will pay actual cash for just a few hours of their full or spare time. You don't need sales experience. I don't need big talkers, "hot air shooters" or "city slickers." What I want is sincere men and women who will be as honest with me as I guarantee to be with them.

I Even Pay You a Cash Penalty
If You Don't Make Big Money the Very First Day

I make it easy and simple. Just say 20 magic words to 10 ladies a day—20 secret words that have proven almost magical money-getters for over 25,000 of my "partners"—an amazing yet strangely simple 20-word sentence that took me 35 years to discover. I give you 35 years of money-making experience in 2 minutes. I want to help my "partners" make as much money as they can. I don't try to "hog" it all. That's why my "partners" stick with me instead of jumping to other jobs. I not only pay you actual cash for your time—I go farther! I even pay you a handsome profit on every order my customers give you. So what is to stop you from making as high as $35 in a day like some of my other partners? I know what you can do if you'll just spend 4 or 5 hours a day honestly for me. And to prove that I feel sure of what I'm talking about I will actually pay you a cash penalty out of my own pocket if you don't make big money the very first day you follow my simple plan. But even if you don't get any orders I still pay you this cash penalty.

I don't let you risk one penny. I'll take all the chances. I prove this to you. To show you that I handle big things in a big way, I will even send you $13.00 worth of my goods right out of stock to start you. Mail coupon at once for this sensational offer. Don't send a cent. I will send you letters from other men and women whom this free offer started on the road to independence. Why can't you do as well? Maybe you think this is just an ordinary job. But don't be mistaken. If you treat me fairly I'll set you up in a business of your own. I'll tell you a priceless secret that will get others to make money for you. Right now I promise to help toward ending your money worries, and I am known to 25,000 partners as the man who always keeps his promises. If $10 a day or even more will end your money worries, then mail the application below right now for this steady employment offer. Start in spare time if you wish and I'll still pay you this cash penalty. If you are a married woman, you can surely devote a few spare hours a day. My plan is a funny one. Some of my women "partners" have actually made more than their husbands in a few hours of this pleasant, dignified work. It's too bad that space here is not large enough to explain all my other daring money-making offers. I would also like to have you read some of the thousands of unusual letters from men and women "partners" whose money worries I have helped end. I would like to tell you what Howard L. Adams wrote about the new car I gave him, and about Rev. McMurphy's letter which said I enabled him to pay the mortgage on his home. I will even show you letters from grateful widows who are now able to support their families. It all sounds almost unbelievable—yet I prove every word of it at my own risk.

I Send You $13.00 Worth of Goods at My Risk to Start You.

Just Rush Coupon For This Offer.

Start Your Pay Now

Send No Money. Just Mail Coupon.

I need 1100 more "partners" quick on my daring new cash pay plan. This announcement will probably "upset" the nation. Untold thousands will apply for these positions. If you delay it may be too late. The time to act is—NOW! Tear out the employment Application Coupon below and mail it quick for this steady position, offer of $13.00 worth of my goods and the 20 magic words that may mean a "fortune" to you. Send no money. Just the coupon. **This coupon is not an order that obligates you to pay anything. Nothing will be sent C.O.D.**

C. W. Van De Mark, President
The Health-O Quality Products Co.
Dept. 1094-CC, Health-O Bldg. Cincinnati, O.

C. W. Van De Mark, President
The Health-O Quality Products Co.
Dept. 1094-CC, Health-O Bldg.
Cincinnati, Ohio.

Dear Van: I hereby apply for the position as "partner" in my town on your new cash pay plan. Send your sensational offer of $13.00 worth of your products to start me. Also tell me how I can make money introducing you to 10 ladies and using the 20 magic words that make fortunes. **This is not an order—send nothing C.O.D.** I risk nothing.

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Address .....

City .....State .....

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Why pay an extravagant price for strength—here's an opportunity to get all the equipment you require along with an excellent course of instructions for only $5.00. Realize your ambition and develop muscles of a super-man. *Get strong and amaze your friends.* We show you how to easily master feats which now seem difficult—or if you just want physical culture for your health's sake, this equipment is just what you need. With this special offer you save at least $20.00. We furnish a ten cable chest expander which is adjustable to give resistance up to 200 lbs. It is made of new live extra strength, springy rubber so as to assure long wear and give the resistance you need for real muscle development. You also get a pair of patented hand grips for developing powerful grip and forearms.

We include wall exercising parts which permit you to develop your back, arms and legs--a real muscle necessity. You know that business men and athletes, too, first show their age in their legs. Develop your leg muscles with the foot strap which we furnish. This will give you speed and endurance--but that isn't all that you get. In addition we include a specially written course which contains pictures and diagrams showing you how to develop any part of your body so that you will quickly get on with these exercises and gain the greatest advantage from their use. Act now while you can get in on this special offer. It might be withdrawn, so rush the coupon.

SEND NO MONEY

All of the items pictured on this page are included in this big special reduction offer. Sign your name and address to the coupon below and rush it to us. We will send your ten cable chest developer, the wall parts, a pair of hand grips, foot strap and the course by return mail. Pay the postman only $5.00, plus the few cents postage on arrival. (If you desire to send check or money order in advance, we pay postage.)

GUARANTEE

All Crusader products are guaranteed to give entire satisfaction or money back.

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I accept your offer. Send me everything described in your advertisement by return mail. I will pay postman $5.00 plus postage on arrival. It is understood if I am not entirely satisfied after examination I can return the goods and you will refund my money.

Note:—No C. O. D. Orders to Foreign Countries or Canada.

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Street _____

City _____ State _____

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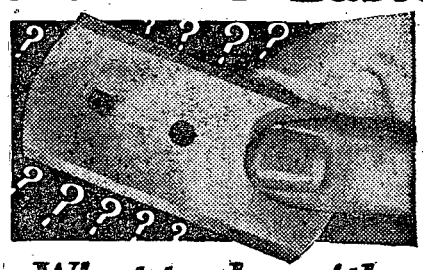

What to do with Old Razor Blades!

DON'T throw them away! For old razor blades are worth **real** money—now that Kriss Kross rejuvenates them an amazing way—and gives them the kind of edge you have only **dreamed** about until now. And not only that, it can take a new blade right out of a fresh package and increase its sharpness almost 100%! Kriss Kross makes blades **last** astonishingly, too. Ten weeks of slick shaves from a single blade is only a **low** average—while any number of cases are on record where one blade has lasted for 365 keen, cool shaves a year!

Sensational Offer

And now for my surprising offer. To introduce Kriss Kross to those who have not yet seen it, I am giving with it Free a new kind of razor. Possesses remarkable features. Comes with 5 special-process blades and is entirely unlike anything you ever saw before!

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Only 4 Motions used in playing this fascinating instrument. Our native Hawaiian instructors teach you to master them quickly. Pictures show how. Every *thing explained clearly.*

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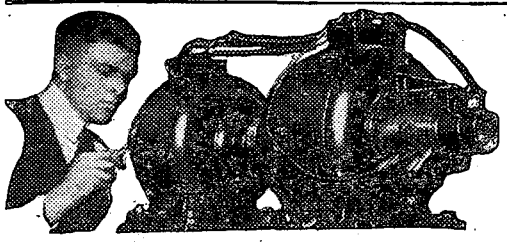

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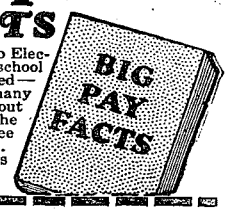

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KRISTEE MFG. CO., 923 Bar St., AKRON, OHIO.

Here's an Amazing New Business THAT PAYS UP TO $1,000 A MONTH

A SURPRISING new profit opportunity is now offered to every ambitious man and woman! A sensational new kind of food business has been invented that can be operated by anyone in either full or spare time. Now, almost incredible as it may sound, $400 to $1000 a month is possible in even the smallest cities!

We supply you with equipment and plans for making and selling a delicious new greaseless doughnut that is cooked in a remarkable electrical device. Easy to digest and more toothsome than old-style doughnuts ever were. This delicious new dainty—Brown Bobby—costs less to make and sells four times as fast. No wonder so many people without one bit of experience are literally cleaning up fortunes with this new moneymaker.

You can open a shop; rent cheap floor space in a grocery, delicatessen, lunch counter, drug store, etc. Or start at home—and make good profits your very first week!

$3,000 in 3 Months
"I made $3,000 in 3 months from my greaseless doughnut business."
Thos. Minch, Fla.

Men and women start in this business daily. You cannot afford to delay. Details will gladly be sent without obligation of any sort. Such an amazing moneymaker may never be offered you again. Write at once for full plans and details.

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Here's a Wonderful Opportunity to Make $15 a Day

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Start Right In

You positively don't need any experience or capital to make big money my way. No course of training is necessary. You simply act as my Representative in your locality and look after my business there. All you have to do is call on your friends and my established customers and take care of their orders for my fast-selling line of Groceries, Toilet Articles and other Household Necessities. You alone get the profits on all orders from these customers. They *must* order from you because I never sell through stores. Last year my Representatives made nearly *two million dollars*. When I get the coupon from you I send full details of my money-making proposition. You can quickly be making real money just like I said. *I will also supply you with Groceries and other Household Necessities at lowest, wholesale prices.*

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MAIL THIS NOW!

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Send me, without cost or obligation, all the facts about your new proposition that offers a wonderful opportunity to make quick profits of $15 or more in a day besides getting Groceries at Wholesale.

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Send for FREE Book

If you have this gland trouble or if you have any of the symptoms mentioned above, you should not lose a day in writing for the scientist's Free book, "Why Men Are Old at 40." It will enable you to ask yourself certain frank questions that reveal your true condition. Every man past 40 should make this test, as insidious prostate disorder often leads to surgery. This book is absolutely free, but mail coupon immediately, as the edition is limited. Address

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There are eight babies in the picture at left. Two, and only two, are alike. These two are the twins. See if you can find them. The rest are different either in their clothes or in their eyes. When you find the twins, mark them with an "X," tear out the picture and send it to me together with your name and address.

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By Vivian Grey

She was rich. And he was poor. She gave him up because she didn't want to break his mother's heart, the heart of the woman who had saved and scrimped so that he might go to college and get away from the manual labor that seemed destined for him.

It was an impulsive act, the sort of thing she was always doing, for at the start she had acted on impulse when she left her luxurious home to cast in her lot with the humble folk on the other side of the creek. It was impulse that sent her out at midnight to make her own way in the world, alone, with no money in her purse. And when Phil Rhoades found her and would bring her back, she refused, for she was determined that she would not stand in the way of the career of the man she loved.

In a way, it is true that most of us act on impulse at one time or another, trusting somehow to the hidden voices within us that our actions may be for the best. The author of this absorbing story tells what may happen when we make impulse the guide to life. It is a story of youth in the grip of a great love that is here before us, a book that we do not lay aside until the last page is read, and one that we take up again, for it is well worth the rereading.

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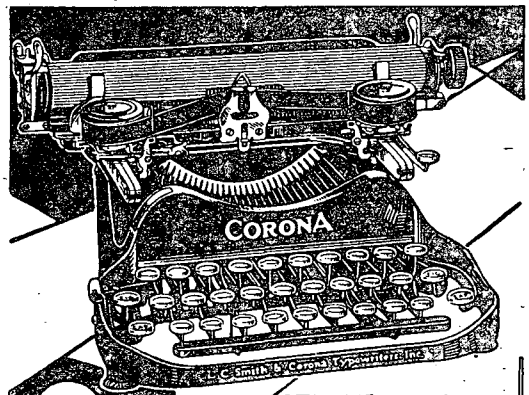

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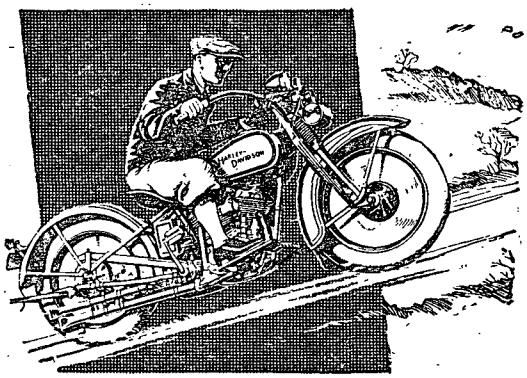

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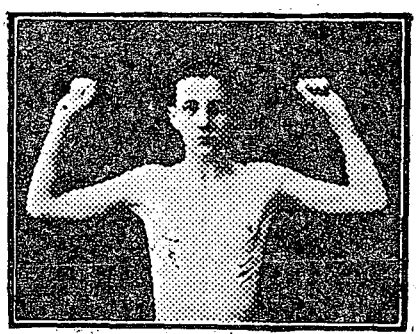
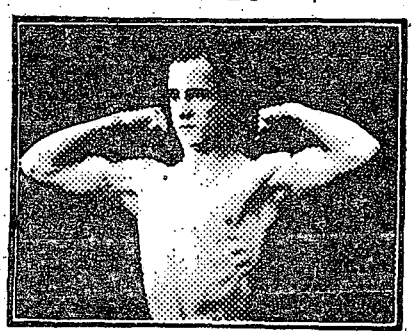


ONE!



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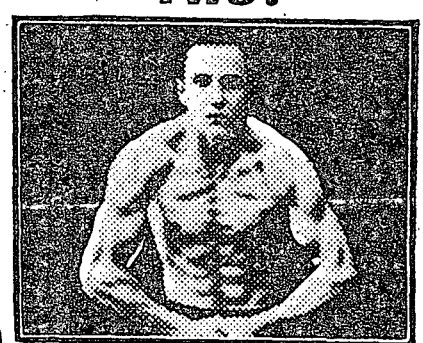

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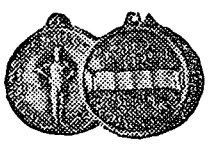

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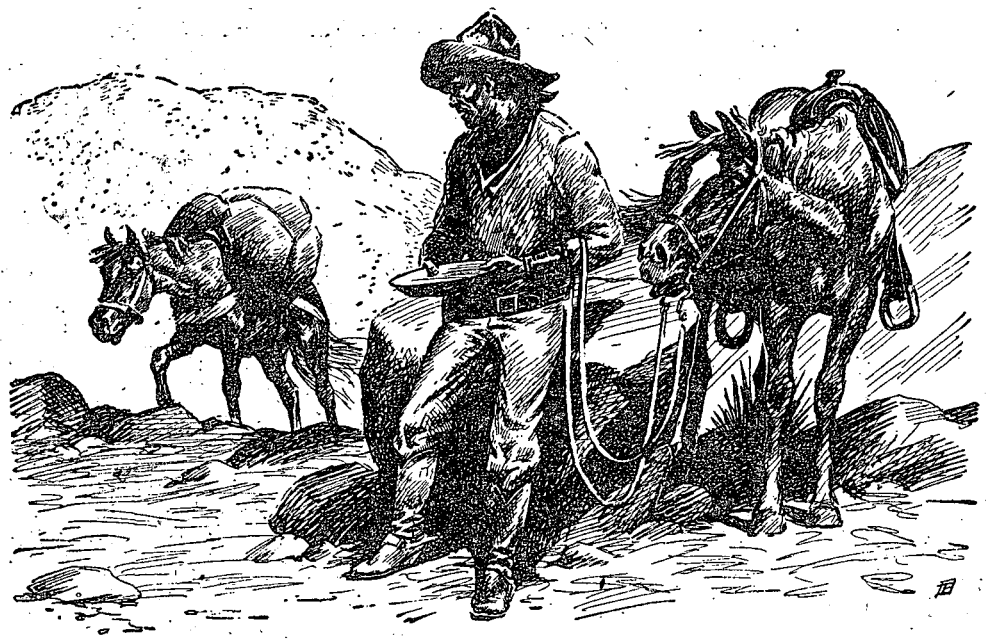

Spuds

By Seth Ranger

Author of "Treed," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE RED MESA COUNTRY.

ITH black fury in his heart, Vance McMicken rode through Gunsight Pass and into the Red Mesa country. If all went well he would kill Gus Pringle and be occupying a jail cell within the next twenty-four hours. Thus, the beauty of the country was lost on him, for he rode with lowered eyes, nursing his revenge. Both man and horse were gray with dust and nearing exhaustion. McMicken's eyes were bloodshot from dust, hot winds, and lack of sleep.

"Whoa, Jerry!" he ordered.

The horse stopped, and for several seconds neither man nor animal looked up. Each was too tired from the climb to the summit. The man's hands rested on the pommel of the saddle. his chin sagged to his breast, and the horse swayed. They might well have served as a model for a statue entitled "Trail's End." Figures and setting were perfect. The man had driven himself and his mount without mercy to accomplish a mission, and victory was almost within his grasp.

"Water down below, Jerry," McMicken said; "we'll rest a minute! Here's the last!"

He poured the last water of a canteen into a tin basin. The horse drank half; the remainder Vance saved for his pack horse toiling up the trail. He drank none himself, but several times he licked his dry lips. A half minute passed before the pack horse came into sight. Leather creaked, dust eddied about his hoofs, and his head swayed

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from side to side. His nose was almost to the ground as if the weight of his head was too great for his tired neck. He, too, drank the scant water with gratitude. McMicken rubbed his nose.

"Water and feed down below," Vance said thickly. Then for the first time he looked down on the mesa where he was to enact the great drama of his life. At first, it meant merely the end of his trail. Somewhere in that vast expanse of orchards and fields Gus Pringle stalked his arrogant way. Then slowly the beauty of the land dawned on the man. His face lost some of the tense, white expression; the eyes looked less like a predatory animal's and more like a human being's. "A great country," he said softly, "too great to be run by Pringle. Well, it won't be run by him—much longer."

Nature had taken ages to build this land to her liking. First, she had almost surrounded the mesa with reddish hills and buttes, and these gave the mesa a reddish tint. For countless centuries the prevailing west wind had brought dust from other lands and an occasional rain. The two had mixed, and year by year the soil grew deeper until a plow could turn over the earth within a foot or two of the rockiest butte and never strike a boulder.

But it needed more than rich soil and an occasional rain to make this land flourish to the utmost. And so Nature had waited until man came and stored the water in the mountains beyond, then led it through ditches and canals to the fertile, dry soil of the mesa. Then more men had come and slowly beaten the desert growth back and planted things of their own choosing. Man's progress could be seen in the ages of the trees. There were apple and fruit orchards old enough for the limbs to meet; shade trees high enough to afford protection to two-story houses on hot days. There were younger trees, struggling for life in parched ground; small houses standing in the open, exposed to the midday glare, and fields of half-dead grass. Water from a small lake was carried in flumes to the trees and was running slowly down furrows where it quickly disappeared in the thirsty soil.

Vance stopped at the nearest flume and permitted his horses to drink, but he did not taste the water himself. It had stood too long in the shallow lake to be safe. Sad experience had taught him it was better to go dry than to drink bad water. He made his way slowly to the nearest house. It stood apart from the orchard, and had been constructed against a butte that all the good soil might be used for the orchard and vegetable garden.

Piled in front of the house was an assortment of battered household goods. Evidently, a wagon had dumped the stuff into the yard a few minutes before, and the owners had not had time to straighten things out. A glance convinced Vance McMicken that he had encountered dire poverty again. His face grew hard, and an unpleasant glitter came into his hazel eyes. If he was not mistaken, here was another hopeful family, attempting to rise from poverty, victimized by Gus Pringle and his land-selling schemes.

A ragged child, unspeakably dirty, was sitting on a pile of worn bedding. Two other children, also ragged, were playing in an irrigation ditch. A woman had placed two lengths of stovepipe on a rusty kitchen range and was cooking meals in the open. A boy of fourteen was coming over the ridge carrying an armful of brush for fuel. He, too, was ragged. His toes came through his worn-out shoes, his bare knee was visible through a patch in his overalls. The patching was evidently done by some one who had done a lot of it in the past. There was a neatness that only came with long experience.

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McMicken touched the brim of his Stetson. "Evening, lady," he said.

The woman looked up. She was tall and angular. Her clothing had evidently come from some long-forgotten closet. The shoes came well above her ankles and were badly worn, nearly half the buttons were off. They were small, black buttons, like the eyes of some small animal peering from a den. Her cotton stockings were only visible when she bent over. They were mostly holes. The skirt came below the shoe tops and sagged in front. She wore a jacket with huge puffed sleeves. It was pinned together with a safety pin. Her hair hung in wisps about her face. "Evenin', mister," she said in a weary voice.

"I'd like a drink of water," McMicken announced. "I've watered my horses at the flume, but the water doesn't look good to me. It really isn't good enough for the horses."

The children stopped playing and grouped about, frankly eying the arrival. The boy dropped his wood behind the stove and turned to the woman. "What's the matter? More trouble?"

"Poor kid," thought McMicken; "evidently, he's had so much trouble he naturally expects nothing else."

"No," the woman said, "he only wants a drink. Here, take this!" She held up a canteen. "I brung it along just in case——" She did not finish the sentence, but McMicken understood. "There's mostly cisterns hereabouts," she explained, "and you can never tell when a cistern hasn't been used long what's down there. There's holes in the top." She pointed to the wooden cover. "And like as not rabbits and things has fell in. I says to 'Dearie'—that's my man—'this water ain't fitten to drink and you go and fetch some.' He went about four hour ago and ain't showed up yet." She looked a bit worried.

"Prob'ly's drunk," the boy suggested.

"No," the woman insisted, "he ain't. He promised me he'd start over again and wouldn't touch a drop." She looked across the country and shaded her eyes with a gnarled hand.

"He's promised before," the youth said. "Promises don't mean much to him."

"Now, Jack," she said, "it ain't fitten you talk like that about your father. You should respect——"

"I haven't any respect for the old bum," the youth said. His eyes smoldered, and his jaw set.

Vance McMicken experienced a queer feeling. A youth with no respect for his father did not sound well. Something was wrong. Either with the youth or with the father.

"Well, thanks for the water," McMicken said. "I'll be moving along. Don't mind if I camp over there by the cottonwood?"

"Naw, that ain't on our property," the woman answered. "If you need any more water I can spare a drop."

"Thanks." McMicken walked over and peered into the cistern. Several objects were floating about—rabbits probably. "Don't use this stuff," he warned. "the whole thing will have to be cleaned——. Oh, excuse me, miss." He had stepped backward and almost knocked a young woman sprawling.

"Oh, don't mention it," the girl replied, then she turned and walked away. She had evidently stepped up from nowhere to peer into the cistern while McMicken held up several boards. He caught the briefest glance of her, but it was sufficient to give a complete picture. She apparently did not belong to the woman. She was of a different breed; better dressed, neat and alert. Perhaps she had not known the hardships the woman had experienced. The woman was a beaten woman. Back in her mind, perhaps, a hope of better things burned. But she expected and was prepared to accept the worst. The girl was more like one carrying on a battle. Her manner was defiant. She

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was, perhaps, five feet two inches tall, and weighed around one hundred and ten pounds, McMicken guessed. Her serious face was pretty; her hair and eyes were brown, and there was firmness about her jaw. There was firmness in her step as she entered the house and disappeared.

The woman smiled. "My niece," she explained, "and don't mind her. She just naturally hates all men."

"She's young, only twenty or so?" McMicken suggested.

"Nineteen——"

"Aunt Martha," came the girl's crisp voice, "don't talk too much."

"Land sakes," the woman complained, "talkin' is the only fun I have in life. But then, I ain't complainin' so long as we have health." She looked over her grimy brood and sighed. "They're a sight, and always will be. What without conveniences——"

"You'll have 'em when I grow up," Jack promised. He might have been a fighter, studying an enemy, when he made the statement. His face was grave, jaw set, and eyes half closed. Then, with a trace of discouragement, he added: "But it takes so long for a kid to grow up."

Again, McMicken thought: "Something wrong here. When a kid can hardly wait to grow up he's not happy. I can stand most anything except to see kids get a tough break. None of my business, though. I've got a duty to perform. I've got to hunt down Gus Pringle and kill him." He turned to go. "Thanks again for the water. In case you want any help such as putting up the stove, or beds, or the like of that, just call. My name's McMicken—Vance McMicken."

"I'm Mrs. Craddock—Martha Craddock."

While McMicken made camp, the sun dropped behind the distant buttes. For a moment the Red Mesa country seemed bathed in a soft, pink flame, then the pink faded from the sky and darkness was upon them. The odor of fried potatoes came from the Craddock front yard; a candle flickered occasionally as the various members of the family worked at setting their house in order and grabbed their food in relays. Now and then a child would whimper, but never actually cry. Hardship was so normal a condition that only the unusual could make these children cry.

It grew dark and McMicken sat with his back to the cottonwood tree and smoked. To-morrow night he would be in jail, charged with murder. Some would regard him as a public benefactor, but the law would call it murder. This was his last night in the open, perhaps. He stayed up long after the Craddock household grew silent, and still Craddock did not come.

"Found a bottle of moonshine," McMicken decided. "He'll come home drunk, and then what will happen? Well, it's none of my business. Still—there's that boy, Jack. The sort of a boy I was; the same sort of dreams. He's going to make it easier for his mother. So was I, but she died before I had a chance." A bitter smile played around his lips. "Huh! If she had lived to be a hundred years old, it'd still have been too late. I turned out to be a proper bum. Never found myself. Maybe killing Pringle is my mission in life, after all. Maybe—then again maybe that isn't it. But if that isn't, then I've never found my place in the scheme of things."

CHAPTER II.

THE WORLD'S MEANEST MAN.

SUDDENLY Vance McMicken found himself wide awake. Just what awakened him he did not know. There was no interval between deep sleep and wakefulness; no period during which he rubbed his eyes and slowly responded

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to the urge to waken. One moment he was dead to the world; the next he was sitting up wide awake. The sky was gray; the draws were dark; but on the mesa it was almost light enough to distinguish objects some distance away. He heard a rooster crow on some distant ranch. It was answered; then a Chinese pheasant cock sent forth his defiant challenge to his kind. It was answered. Silence; then——

"Mr. McMicken!"

It was the high-pitched voice of an excited or hysterical woman. "Mr. McMicken!" Then it was lower. "You don't dare—— You know perfectly well you don't dare!"

"I don't, eh?" This was a man's voice, sneering and unpleasant. Almost instantly came the sound of a fist against flesh.

"Oh!" This was a moan. "Oh! Mr. McMicken!"

"Shut up! Don't expect any help from that man. I saw the little runt as I came home."

Vance leaped from his blankets, pulled on his boots, and ran to the Craddock house. "Little runt, eh?" He almost gnashed his teeth. "I'm no heroic figure," he muttered, "but there have been times when I've cut the big ones down to my size."

He knew he was risking a bullet, perhaps, but without hesitation he pulled open the door and entered the room. He had seen poverty in his knocking about the country, but nothing to equal this. The children were sleeping on pads on the floor. Or, at least, they had been sleeping. Each child was fully awake; each in terror except the fourteen-year-old boy, Jack. The finger marks of a large hand glowed faintly on his cheek. He stood with half-raised fists, his eyes cool with appraisal as if weighing his chances of success. Through his set lips came a challenge:

"When I get bigger you won't hurt mamma, and I ain't afraid to tell you so, either."

The man ignored his boy's threat. His eyes were on Vance McMicken. Mrs. Craddock stood against the wall, sobbing. There was no sign of the girl. Craddock stepped toward McMicken, and paused. For a moment neither man spoke, and they presented an interesting contrast.

Craddock weighed at least two hundred and twenty-five pounds. His chest was deep; his arms were long and powerful. His face was covered with a week's beard; his eyes were dull with whisky. He tottered a moment on his feet as if waiting for the fog to clear from his brain before attacking the intruder. And the intruder failed to be impressed by Craddock's bulk.

McMicken stood five feet nine inches in his high-heeled boots. He weighed a hundred and sixty pounds, but it was mostly bone, muscle, and nerve. His strong hands were scarred from rope burns, but some of the scars came from rough-and-tumble fights with men bigger than himself, and the scars had been made because he had hit his opponents hard enough to cut his own hands.

Craddock suddenly made a rush. Without hesitation, McMicken shifted safely out of the way and drove his fist into the big man's stomach. Craddock doubled up, which brought him down to McMicken's size. The latter smashed him on the jaw; then, as he fell, dragged him into the fresh air. For the first time McMicken spoke.

"So this is Dearie, is it?" he asked.

"That is Dearie," the woman said. "You won't hurt him, will you, Mr. McMicken? It's only when he's been drinking he's like this. He's——"

"Sure, I know," McMicken interrupted. It was the old, old story of a woman hoping to the last that others might not think too harshly of the man she had chosen. McMicken knew that deep in Mrs. Craddock was the belief

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that some day the man would straighten up and take a respected place in the community. It was a belief only a wife could have.

"What are you going to do with him?" the wife asked, as Vance shouldered the unconscious man and staggered away.

"We're going to have a quiet litttle talk," he explained. "I'm going to try and show him the error of his ways."

Craddock was still unconscious when McMicken reached his own camp. There, he took the precaution of roping him rather thoroughly. As day began to break, he took the precaution of moving his camp just out of sight of the Craddocks. He half expected that either Jack or his mother might interfere in spite of Craddock's treatment. Families have a way of hanging together against the world.

Presently a footfall sounded and McMicken was surprised to find himself facing the girl again. She eyed him coolly.

"Good morning, Mr. McMicken," she said. "I am Edith Craddock. No, he's not my father. He is my uncle. My father is dead, and this man is acting as my guardian until I am twenty-one years old."

"Guardians must have been scarce," McMicken observed dryly.

"My father was probably the only man in the world who had faith in his brother to the last. You see, this man" —she indicated the now snoring hulk— "was his younger brother. He always felt he had not been properly approached, or something. I came over to find out what you plan to do."

"Talk it over, and hope that I can drive home a few points for the sake of the boy, Jack, and the smaller kids. It isn't right that a boy should want to live just to get big enough to stop his father from beating his mother. That's what got under my skin."

"Then the children are your reasons for becoming interested in him?" she suggested. There was doubt in her eyes.

Vance did not like it. "That is the reason, and no other," he explained. "I had it tough when I was a kid, but my father was sickly and not a drunk. Just the same, I know what it is to have the breaks all against you. You don't need to be suspicious of me."

"All men are selfish," she said quietly, "and naturally when a man takes an interest in anything, I look for the reason. I have yet to find an unselfish, disinterested man."

"Then I won't hold it against you for being suspicious of me," he retorted. "I feel sorry for you. But I'm not carting Craddock off to do you a good turn," he added, "just on account of the kids. You can take care of yourself. You are old enough to clear out if you don't like it. And, while we're on the subject, I'm not crazy about the girls. They're all out to get what they can out of a man. Twice in my life I've found girls down and out, or I thought they were. Each time I staked them. I didn't mind losing the money, but I hated to be laughed at and regarded as a sucker afterward."

The girl did not answer him, but walked over to the unconscious Craddock. McMicken watched her through half-closed eyes. She was a merciless little party, he decided, and yet she seemed to be sorry for her uncle rather than to hate him. "Don't kill him," she said, turning suddenly to McMicken; "but I wish you would beat him to within an inch of his life."

"If I can," he said.

"Why can't you? He's drunk!" she snapped.

"Say," he growled, "you give me a pain in the neck! What do you think I am—some coyote? I wouldn't beat up my worst enemy if he was drunk. I'd wait until he sobered up." He looked her squarely in the eyes. "And

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a girl who'd want a relative beaten up can't have much family loyalty."

That stung her. She flushed. "I've as much loyalty as any one in the world. But that's just the trouble. I've been too loyal; too gentle. Now, I'm going to fight back. Why shouldn't I want him beaten up if there's a chance it will do some good? He's the meanest man in the world."

"Perhaps," the man answered, "bar one!"

"Bar one? Who is it?"

"Gus Pringle, who takes advantage of poor wretches trying to improve their lot. He owns most of the good stuff below us." He waved toward the larger orchards. "But he didn't create that. Men broke their hearts creating that wealth, and he took it. Women grew old in helping the men—worthwhile men, though you probably can't realize there are such. Then what? Well, they started over again pretty late in life."

"Cruel," she said to herself, "but not the meanest. There's the meanest." She pointed to Craddock. "His wife worked until she got ten dollars for the baby's layette, and he took it and got drunk. The baby wouldn't have had a thing if it hadn't been for the neighbors. That didn't happen here!"

"Where did it happen?"

"In the city, where we came from, with the hope he could brace up and make a new start. There he is—finished before he even started." McMicken thought she was going to cry, but she didn't. She just walked away as if she were sure he could relate no stronger incident of man's perfidy. Nor could he!

He scowled at Craddock, then lifted him to the pack horse, lashed him securely, and set off for the sagebrush. He managed to keep out of sight of the house most of the way, but there must have been a moment when Jack Craddock had seen what was going on. Without warning, he suddenly popped from a clump of brush and covered McMicken with a rusty Winchester. "Do you aim to kill him?" he asked.

"No, sonny, I don't," McMicken answered. "I am going to throw a scare into him. He needs it."

"Yes, he needs it." The boy looked at his father—the look of a mature person rather than the carefree glance of youth. "Yes, he needs it. Gosh, I've wanted a regular dad at times, but our family don't have much luck! It makes me feel funny inside of me when I think some day I'll have to beat up on him to make him stop hurting mother, but I figure I'll do it."

"I figure you won't have to, Jack," McMicken said kindly. "I figure before long your dad will change his ways."

"You ain't stringing me, mister? You don't figure to hurt him—much?"

"My word on it, Jack," McMicken said seriously. This was nothing to laugh at. It was almost tragedy.

"I'll take your word on it, mister," the boy said. "I've heard that men like you never lie. You are a kind of a cowpuncher, ain't you?"

"Yes, a kind of a one," McMicken admitted, wishing he was really somebody just then. "But I'm no hero. Heroes are big, handsome lads, not sawed-off cusses with rusty hair and ordinary mugs like mine."

"I guess that's so," Jack answered. "I saw a movie once and the hero was almost pretty." He looked at his father. "Maybe I hadn't ought to let you do what you figure to do. But if father would only stay away, it'd even be better. That's terrible to say, but mother can do a lot of things if she ain't hampered by father. He's what you might call the straw what breaks the camel's back."

"Run on, Jack, and I'll speak to your father," McMicken said.

Speaking to father consisted of

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throwing him into an irrigation ditch, then dragging him out. Craddock blinked and presently looked around. Then he fell asleep again. He slept three hours, then awakened with a headache; but at least he was sober.

"What have you got me tied up for?" he growled.

"Just to keep you here until you are sobered up, then I'm going to give you a taste of your own medicine. You are a failure as a man, but a bigger failure as a father."

"None of your business," Craddock retorted.

"I know it," McMicken cheerfully admitted, "but that don't help you any. You are as helpless right now as your family is when you start working on 'em. You've never felt that way, but you're going to feel that way now for several minutes. Why don't you go off and die somewhere and give your children a chance? They've got stuff in them. They probably get it from their mother. They'll amount to something, with her help, if you'll give 'em a chance. Your children are sleeping on the floor; other men's children, or maybe I'd better say the children of men, are sleeping in beds. But why tell you about it? You've sunk so low you've no pride left. Now get up!"

McMicken cut the rope binding Craddock's feet, then stepped back until the big man was ready. It wasn't long. Purple with fury because of McMicken's studied insults, he rushed.

It was not a pretty fight. McMicken, knowing that if Craddock ever got a good grip on him he was done for, kept his distance. He stepped in and gradually beat Craddock down to his size, then he knocked him out. He waited until the man regained consciousness, then knocked him out again. Only when the wretch was tottering would McMicken stop. "Don't hit me again," the hulk pleaded. "I'm licked."

"Then get out of the country," McMicken ordered, "and don't come back until you're sure that big boy of yours won't be ashamed of you. This is a new place he's moved to. Give him a chance; don't let the other kids point him out as the boy whose father is a bum. Now, light out!"

And the smaller man kicked the larger one onto the road leading from Red Mesa to the country beyond.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT NEXT?

WHEN Vance returned to his camp, Edith Craddock was waiting for him. She eyed his bleeding knuckles with interest, then looked into his face for signs of the conflict. There were none. McMicken wondered what she thought; but her face did not betray her opinion.

"You said something of Gus Pringle's methods," she said. "Just how can he hurt us, for example? We have bought twenty acres of young orchard, and twenty more of unplanted land. The land is fertile, and we have plenty of water." She indicated the lake that extended along the buttes. It was a natural reservoir. She continued: "The deed Pringle gave us says the small orchards immediately below the lake have first call on the water. If we pay our interest when it is due, how can he hurt us?"

As she put the query, the cold mask she wore dropped for a moment. He looked behind it and saw a worried girl.

"Craddock put everything he had into this ranch, eh?" he asked.

"He had nothing. The money was mine; the ranch is in my name. I agreed to it because I thought it would get him away from the city and give him the chance he was looking for. It would be better for the children; for all of us. I guess I had my father's faith in him. But it's gone now. I hope he doesn't come back. Aunt

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Martha is fool enough to love him; but even she will see that without him she has a better chance to get ahead. Secretly, she will feel badly about it—she's that sort. She refuses to have all her girlish dreams smashed. In private, she will hug what shreds of her romance remain to her breast and will find some comfort in that. Together we will fight this out; but I want to know what to expect from Pringle."

"Come with me!" Vance led the way to the lake. "Look down there!" he said.

"Wagon tracks?" she exclaimed.

"Now we'll go to the opposite side," he suggested. Again he pointed.

"Wagon tracks. Do you mean——"

"I mean that a wagon was driven across that lake last summer. The wheels sunk into the mud, and the mud later baked hard. The tracks are there for anybody to see. That lake is only a temporary affair. It catches the flood water that rushes down from the buttes and hills, but the water doesn't stay there. The lake bottom is porous; the water seeps into the lower country, and is picked up and stored in Pringle's reservoirs. That is why the orchards in the lower country are so much larger. There are orchards up here just as old, but they have been stunted by lack of water.

"Pringle watches the mountains. When he sees a dry spell ahead and a shortage of irrigation water in the mountain dams, he unloads this upper-country stuff onto ranchers and city people who want to be ranchers. They see the lake and feel sure they have plenty of water. They find out too late. Poor crops or none at all follow. They can't meet their payments, and the ranches revert to Pringle. He's ahead the money they've paid down, and so, even in dry years, he takes plenty of money off this upper-country stuff. But don't worry," Vance suddenly concluded. "He's stung his last man."

"What do you mean?" She saw his face suddenly change. It grew dark with fury, and there came into his eyes a light she had never seen in human eyes before—not even in Craddock's eyes when he was in the grip of a drunken rage.

"I mean," he said, "I'm going to kill him!"

"Kill him?" She breathed the words. "Why, that's murder! They will hang you?"

"Of course, unless the jury is made up of former upper-country ranchers, then I'll be freed with cheers. But that won't happen. I'll be tried in the usual way, and hanged in due time. Don't look surprised. I've thought it all out."

"And the reason for this step? Did he injure you?" she asked.

"Not me! I told you my father died when I was a kid, after a long sickness. Well, mother died later. That's why I'm for the kid who is trying to get along. A man gave me a helping hand when I needed it, and I sure needed it. 'Pop' Kelso they called him. Pop spent nearly a lifetime helping others; then he realized he was getting along and it was time he helped himself. What he had left after helping me in school, he saved. And he put it all into one of Pringle's ranches. Well, I don't like to think how Pop must have fought to save himself. He always was a fighter, but he was too old to do his best. He had a horror of living in some old man's home on charity. He was too proud. That's why he used to help kids out—so they could always stand on their own hind legs. It took a sheriff and posse to get Pop off his place when he lost it. He didn't just understand the law about unpaid mortgages, and Pringle wouldn't give him time. They got the drop on Pop and took him out of the country and turned him loose. The sheriff was decent that way. He hates Pringle himself; but he's great on the law.

"I missed Pop and put in quite a time

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finding him." The girl saw Vance McMicken bite his lips to control his emotion. "Well, a week ago I found him up in a cabin two hundred miles from here. His grub was all gone, and he was seated in a chair, with his arms, chest, and head resting on a pine table. His .44 was still gripped in his hand. There was a bullet hole through his heart. He—he didn't leave any note of explanation. He didn't need to."

Both were silent for a long time. If the girl was moved, she did not show it; but she was impressed.

"And you think Pop would approve of your killing Pringle?" she asked.

"No! He'd claim neither Pringle nor himself was worth a young fellow risking his neck for," he answered.

"Doesn't that settle it?" she asked.

"No," he replied. "You see, Pop would have done the same thing for me."

Had Vance been watching the girl closely he might have noticed a queer expression come into her eyes. She grew rather calculating as she studied him, as if weighing his value in some plan of her own. Lost in his memories of the old man who had befriended him, Vance McMicken failed to observe her.

"You are not very revengeful," she observed.

He was startled. "There's no greater revenge," he said quickly.

"Oh, yes, there is," she insisted. "If I wanted to really revenge myself on some one, I wouldn't kill him. First, because death is merciful and quick; second, because by killing I would have to pay a penalty myself. If I had died at sixteen I would have saved myself no end of misery. But I lived. If what you tell me is true, Pringle's whole life is given to reaching out and clutching whatever he touches. The greatest agony he could know would be to see himself slowly beaten by the people he has cheated; to see his control and the land slipping from him acre by acre; to see the others growing more powerful and confident with each victory. That, to Pringle, would be worse than death. And you would be fighting within the law; fighting as he does." She did not smile, but continued to study him, watching the effect of her words. Doubt settled in her eyes. "But no," she added, "you prefer the cruder, less intelligent method—the bullet."

"I hadn't thought of that," he said. "I hadn't thought of that." Then triumph came into her eyes. "Just how would it be done?" Vance asked.

"That would have to be worked out by some man quick to grasp a situation, then act; a man who knows this country; a man who with nothing could beat another man with everything. It would take a real man, Mr. McMicken, but it can be done if the man can be found."

"And the reward?" he asked.

"Your revenge, and perhaps a start in the ranching game on Red Mesa," she suggested.

"Enough," he answered. "Will you help?"

"Of course. I am in the same boat with the others, from what you tell me. We must all help." He looked at her frankly as if estimating her value in the struggle. She misunderstood the look. "Don't expect—romance," she said quickly. The next moment she was furious with herself for saying it. She had intended putting Vance McMicken in what she regarded as his place, at the start. Instead, she had laid herself open to his quick retort.

"Then, if romance has no place," he suggested, "don't make the mistake of falling in love with me. We will of necessity be together a lot."

"There's not the slightest danger of that," she answered, "so please don't worry. Save your worry for your efforts to whip Pringle."

Nor could either be blamed for their attitude. Unfortunate experiences had somewhat shaken the faith of each in

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the other's sex. Her opinion of men was justified. He, in turn, was in no mood to mildly accept what appeared to be a thrust at manhood in general.

"I'll think things over," he informed her. "I may change my mind and get it over with. When I see poor Pop, lying across the table, well——"

"Let me know," she replied, "and if you decide to help us out, we will appreciate it." Again she weighed him with care. "Jack is at the age where he needs the advice of a good man."

"If a good man can be found in the length and breadth of the land," he observed. "I'll let you know this afternoon."

When Vance McMicken called at the Craddock house that afternoon, Mrs. Craddock was on her knees scrubbing a washtub full of youngsters. The range had been set up and was supplying hot water. "I try to keep 'em clean," she explained, "but I ain't got the conveniences. My idear of heaven would be to have runnin' hot and cold water, and a real bathtub. Yes, and electric lights, too. But I guess that's in the future. I could name no end of things I'd like to have, but I ain't complainin' much. So long as the children has health, I'm satisfied." She lifted a youngster from the tub and began drying him with a worn towl. Another stepped into the tub. "Edith was saying something about you staying here and helping out, though goodness only knows where the money to pay you will come from."

"Now, how did Edith know I had made up my mind to stay?" McMicken inquired.

"She just naturally seems to know what people will do," the woman answered.

"As for money, Mrs. Craddock, just forget it. My motive is to square an account with Pringle, and it won't cost the Red Mesa people a thin dime. I will need their help, however." McMicken's glance noted the details of the room, particularly the five pads on the floor where the children slept. "I might as well start in now. Suppose I rig up some bunks for the kids?"

"I've been after Dearie to do that," Mrs. Craddock said, "but he's the sort who never seems to get around to do things. I'm too busy. I made the pads. They're soft enough for the little fellows, but they are pretty thin for the heavier children. I'll say this for my kids, they're not the sort what complains." She never stopped working as she talked. And she talked incessantly. "Just what did you do with Dearie?"

"We had a little talk," McMicken answered, "and he's agreed to go away until he can get hold of himself."

"My! My! Will wonders never cease? You're the first man to have any real influence on Dearie, that, influence for good." The last little Craddock was polished off by this time.

McMicken found a hammer, pulled a few nails from some old lumber, and set to work building bunks for the children. He made each bunk deep so it would hold plenty of straw, then placed the pads on top.

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed Jack on his return. "Beds—real beds, almost."

A smaller boy brought the others in. "Look it! We'll be just like things on shelves." He turned to McMicken. "Gee, you're a nice man! I guess you could do most anything, even—even ——" He searched for the world's greatest human accomplishment. "Even run a railroad engine."

CHAPTER IV.

SPUDS.

As Edith Craddock had said, Jack was at the age when he needed the advice of a grown man. But it must come from a man he respected, and McMicken felt it was up to him to hold

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that respect. There was a small building back of the house which McMicken fixed up for his own use. This accomplished, and his things put in order, he began to plan his battle against Pringle. He counted largely on the element of surprise. Pringle did not expect any one to fight. Usually, each rancher was so busily engaged with his own problems that he did not pay much attention to what was going on about him. Many a man had been neatly trimmed by Pringle and laid it to hard luck. The lake from which he expected to get his water had already dried up. The fact that the lake floor was porous never occurred to him.

Without warning, Vance invited Edith to go for a ride one morning. "You'd better fix up a bite to eat," he suggested; "this is going to be an all-day trip. We're going up to White Water Canyon to see how much water is behind the dam. Then we'll know what to expect later on. Water is the weapon Pringle uses to win his battles, and it must be water we strike back with. I want to beat him to the punch at the start. What with control of the water supply, and the money behind him, he's got a big advantage most of the time."

They devoted themselves to enjoying the scenery as they rode along. Mrs. Craddock and her problems, Dearie, Pringle, and the Red Mesa ranchers, were to be forgotten. And they did forget them during the first part of the day. But when they reached the dam, they appreciated the full extent of the problem. This was early in the year, the planting of small crops was still ahead. The dam should be brim-full, but the water lacked fifty feet of reaching the top. An old caretaker rode up to them on an equally aged horse. "Dryest spell in twenty year," he announced; "never did see so little snow in the mountains." He jerked his thumb toward the distant peaks—the headwaters of White Water. "Just like summer, ain't it?"

"Yes," McMicken agreed, "I came through Gunsight Pass last week expecting rain, and I sure needed water before I got through. Almost drank irrigation water from Deep Lake." He referred to the lake above the ranches.

The caretaker chuckled. "Us old-timers used to call it Dry Lake, but when Pringle came he changed all that. He said 'Deep Lake' sounded prettier."

"And lots more convincing," the girl observed; "it convinced so surely that it never occurred to me we could possibly lack water."

"You will, sister," the old man said. "I suppose Pringle would get my job if he heard me say it; but a man thinks a lot up here alone. When this dry spell is over, he'll have all the upper country ranches again. Ain't ary a rancher got anything laid by. They're mostly poor wretches hangin' on by the skin o' their teeth. No water, no crop; no crop, no money. I've seen it happen before. Settin' up here lookin' down, I can almost tell what Pringle's doin' by the color of the leaves on the trees. His orchards are always green, and on the wet years all of 'em are green but there's been dry years that would fair make a man sick. And when I see orchards that should be green turning a sort of yaller and brown, I know he's cleanin' up again and a lot of people will be leavin' the country before winter. But it seems like there's always a new crop of people, even when there ain't any fruit crop."

From the crest of the dam, the girl could see the whole country as though the engineer who had worked out the irrigation system had stood at this point and planned it. The main ditch followed a snakelike course along the mountains, dropping gradually, and disappearing into a tunnel that ran, for nearly a mile, straight through a lofty peak. There were smaller ditches to

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take care of every ranch in the country, but the older ranches held first rights. These were owned by Pringle. Off to the left, Deep Lake was blue and placid, lending a false atmosphere of security to the small ranches immediately below.

"Where does the water from Deep Lake go to?" Edith asked.

"I tell you, miss, that's the ace up Pringle's sleeve. You see them reservoirs just above his ranch? Well, when I came into this country forty years ago, there was a big spring of water there. It ran to waste for several miles, and there was young trees growing wherever it was damp. When the irrigatin' system was worked out, tests was made proving Deep Lake kept the springs goin', and that's why he had them reservoirs built. That's why they's so big."

"When do you think the lake'll be dry this year?" McMicken asked.

"She'll last to the middle of July," the watchman predicted.

The pair thanked him and started back on the return journey. "Any plan?" the girl asked Vance.

"Nothing definite just yet," he admitted, "but one thing is certain, the little ranchers will have to stick together. It's got to be a one-for-all and all-for-one proposition. They've got to agree on a policy, then stay with it. They've got to present a united front at all times. And," he concluded impressively, "they can't expect to pay out from their fruit crop—there won't be much of a one. It's got to be something that'll grow fast and bring quick profits."

"Chickens?" Edith suggested.

"Won't do," Vance replied. "It'd take thousands of them, and while they were growing up and beginning to lay, they'd have to be fed. The initial investment is too great. In the long run, chickens might work out, but it's got to be something we can cash in on next fall."

She gave him a searching look. "You have something back in your mind?"

"Yes, I have, but I'm not ready to spring it until I can back my idea up with facts. I'm thinking of onions or spuds. They can be planted between the rows of small apple trees as well as in unplanted ground. Next fall we could get original investment and profit as well. Whereas, with chickens and such, we'd still have our capital stock on our hands."

"There's nothing romantic about a potato," the girl suggested. "Take apples, for example. The trees bloom; the bees hum; the fruit ripens, and is, indeed, most beautiful hanging on the trees."

"I thought you said romance had no place in this proposition," Vance reminded her. "All right, we'll take apples. I'll admit they are more romantic than spuds. We have to worry about pests that make them wormy; have to worry about enough water or too much; have to worry about pickers, and cold storage afterward. They have to be packed, too. Now, with spuds, all we have to do is to dig 'em. And often we can sell 'em in the field." He smiled at her. "Who knows, maybe the unromantic spud will save the romantic apple." They rode along in silence, each studying the problem. Relying on spuds was a good deal like relying on a small card to win a pot, but big pots have been won on small cards.

It was a great land for either potatoes or fruit. Frosts did not seem to reach it, and there was something about the atmosphere and soil that colored the apples in the fall, with the result that the Red Mesa brand attracted instant attention and brought the highest market value.

When they arrived home, Mrs. Craddock had put the children to bed and was listening in on the telephone. "The man just put it in to-day," she ex-

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plained. "It is the first telephone I've ever had and——"

"Some old hen's listening in," said the receiver; "wait'll she hangs up."

Mrs. Craddock looked amazed. "Now, how did they guess that?" she asked.

"You had better put your hand over the mouthpiece when you are talking to others, Aunt Martha," Edith suggested. "They heard what you said, naturally. And, besides, it isn't good form to listen in."

"Maybe it ain't," Mrs. Craddock admitted, "but it's entertainin', and it don't cost nothin' to do it. A body might learn somethin' of value, too. Set down and have supper. You both look tuckered out." When they had eaten and were somewhat rested, she began to question them. "What'd you find out about the water? Is it as bad as you feared?"

"Even worse," the girl answered. "Little snow in the mountains. We are due for a serious shortage. But don't you worry. It is my orchard that is involved."

"Yes, I know, but it ain't fitten after all you've done for me, Dearie, and the kids, that you'd lose your money. If there's anything I can do, just let me know. I wish Dearie was here. In his sober moments, he had quite a head on him."

"And," McMicken said to himself, "considering the shellacking I gave him, he must still have quite a head on him."

"We cleaned the cistern out to-day," Mrs. Craddock explained, "and now we'll have water as soon as the cistern run comes. The first thing I done was to telephone about drinkin' water, and the man said it'd be here next week. I put a new packin' in the pump and got it workin' for a change. Land sakes, it'd be heaven to have water running in the house. Just think! Step up, turn on the faucet and water comes. No gettin' the bucket, and going to the cistern, primin' the pump, then workin' the handle for a bucketful. I'll leave you two people to your plannin' now, and I'll go along to bed. It's been a long day, but I ain't complainin', because all my days are long."

McMicken and Edith's planning consisted of calling it a day. "Don't mention the spud idea," he said. "I don't want it to get out until I'm sure it is practical."

Vance McMicken reasoned that the men who made money in the produce business, as well as in the cattle business did not go into the matter blindly and trust to luck. There was cold logic in everything they did. And to combat Pringle he must, in turn, use cold logic. A week had passed since he had sent Craddock away with his ears burning, lips swollen, and eyes almost closed. He had expected the big man to return, seeking revenge, but Craddock had remained away. He was not one to swallow an insult and forget it. He might well be expected to return and take it out on his family, at least.

But when he failed to show up after a week, Vance decided to chance his return and the possible consequences.

"I'm leaving for a week," he explained to Edith; "if Dearie shows up, use this on him." It was a shotgun loaded with salt. "When I return, I hope to have something definite to report. And, say, you had better take my six-gun, too. I might run into Pringle unexpectedly and get excited. I'm trying to hang onto myself, but I don't trust myself to face that cuss just yet."

She watched him hurry away. Jerry, his horse, had enjoyed a week's rest, and as he was but one jump removed from being an outlaw, the animal put on a bucking exhibition that would have been a credit to the Pendleton Roundup. Edith, Jack, and the children were pop-eyed. "I told you he was some kind of a hero," Buddy, the youngest

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boy, insisted. "He just looks like a hero. Ordinary people can't ride horses like that."

Edith's thoughts were different. She was not the slightest bit interested in mankind in general, nor in particular, but this man was the first to treat her impersonally. Nor could she forget that he had reminded her not to fall in love with him. That would set any girl's teeth on edge. "I am wondering," she said thoughtfully, "if he is really doing this to square accounts for his beloved Pop. Or is there another reason in the background?"

While Edith was pondering on the situation, Vance McMicken was doing a little pondering on his own account.

"The coldest little proposition I've ever met," he mused, "and she isn't fooling me any. She using me for her own ends. In the past, when I've helped out the fair sex I spoiled everything by falling in love. There's no chance of doing that this time—thank goodness. I'm doing this for Pop, and nobody else. Still, while I'm squaring accounts, there's no reason why I shouldn't do myself some good; no reason why the money I intended to use when they tried me shouldn't be invested here. When I leave this country, I may as well be a big winner or big loser. Yep, everything I've got goes into the pot."

Vance McMicken was gone nearly ten days, but when he returned he was loaded with information. "Spuds it is," he announced to Edith. "I've been studying statistics for ten years back, and I've been doing some figuring, and now——"

"All very well," she said, "but where are you going to get the water?"

"I've figured that out, too, and I've also figured that if the little ranchers will stick together and see it through, unless some blight comes along and ruins our crop, every ranch in the upper mesa will be clear; that is, unless the rancher is fool enough to let his mortgage ride and blow the money for an automobile. This looks like a spud year to me."

"And once the ranches are clear, then what? Won't Pringle still control the water situation?" she asked.

"He might, but I don't think so. Oh, I'll admit there are plenty of ways in which he can make it tough for us. I'll admit he's not even above getting rid of those who lead the fight, but that's a chance we've got to take. Any man in the valley who'll be scared out by what Pringle may do had better clear out. He don't deserve the good fortune that's here for the winners to take. Don't forget that every small ranch in the district was sold at a bargain so the suckers would bite. Tomorrow I make the first move against him. I want you along when I meet him. I'll need you, Edith—need your coolness when I face the man who practically murdered Pop. You know that big strip of alfalfa and clover land Pringle's got below his reservoirs?"

"It runs all the way from the reservoirs to his orchards, doesn't it?" she asked.

"Yes," Vance answered. "There's quite a bit of land there."

"Yes, I know now."

"Well, I want it. I know it will probably be distasteful to you, Edith, but if he mistakes you for my wife, don't correct him. You'll manage to live it down some time."

"Huh!" she said quickly. "I suppose you would like me to simper and say: 'Oh, it wouldn't be any disgrace to be mistaken for Mrs. Vance McMicken.' Well, I won't say it; but I'll help you because it is for the good of the cause, and because I happen to have heard that Pringle fairly dotes on doing business with newly weds. They are so in love, as a rule, that they are blind to his tricks."

"That's it," Vance said. "I want him to be so interested in putting something

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over on what he believes to be a pair of lovesick fools that he'll overlook the possibility of getting kicked by the recoil." She saw a shadow pass over his face. "But, mostly, I'll need you when I think of Pop," he concluded.

He sauntered into the kitchen and found Mrs. Craddock listening in on the telephone. "Nothin' much goin' on," she confessed. "There's a man named Lundborg got twenty acres of apples and he's always seein' the darkest side of the picture. I'm glad you an' Edith don't hear him talk. You'd quit before you got started. The best he ever gets, accordin' to him, is the worst of it. Huh! That's what I've always got, and what I always expect to get. Chasin' wood for the range; pumpin' water from the cistern; bathin' in a washtub. Oh, hum! But I have my health. Did you want to ask me somethin', Mr. McMicken?"

"Yes," Vance replied. "Have you heard from Mr. Craddock, either directly or indirectly?"

"Dearie's gone for good, I'm afraid. I'm tryin' to tell myself it's better so. Wimmin are such fools. When they love a man, they love him. I sure loved Dearie. At times I thought I didn't any more; but now he's gone I remember his good points. But he was such a poor example for the children. For a time, I was afraid he'd do something to you. He always was revengeful, Dearie was." She smiled, her usual tired smile. "But I'm trying to think it is all for the best. Jack and the other boys are beginnin' to think there're some good men in the world. In fact, Mr. McMicken, I am myself."

"And Edith?"

"She's hopeless." Mrs. Craddock smiled, and for once it was real. "But your treatin' her like nobody in particular is gettin' under her skin. Even men haters don't like to be ignored by the men."

The words, drifting through the open window, reached Edith's ears. She was busy gathering eggs from a nest discreet hens were using under the house. "He makes me tired," she told herself, "so sure he is invincible to feminine charm! For two cents, I'd show him." She stood up and voiced her indignation aloud: "For two cents, I'd show him."

To her amazement, Vance McMicken thrust his head from the window and dropped two cents into her egg basket. "I don't know what it is, but there's your two cents," he said. "Are you on?"

"I certainly am," she answered, thankful she had not blushed or otherwise outwardly indicated her mental disturbance.

They rode into Red Mesa together the following morning. The town was a typical orchard community. There was a single important main street, with a less important intersection. The bank was the most substantial building in town; the packing house down by the railroad track the largest. An electric-power line had reached the town, but had not extended to the ranches beyond. Adjoining the bank, and in the same building, was Pringle's office.

At the entrance, Vance paused. Any plan Edith might have had in her mind to bring him to her feet and earn the two cents had been temporarily shelved. She was beginning to appreciate just how much he meant to the fight to come. She did not want it spoiled now by some violent act on his part. True, his ambition was to remove a man who deserved killing, but it did not necessarily follow that their own position would be thereby improved. Pringle's lieutenants were not noted for their generous ways.

"I guess I'd better come back some other time," Vance whispered. "When I think I'm about to meet him, something comes into my throat and chokes me."

"Whatever you think best," Edith

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said, "but you've got to do it some time."

"Yes, that's so," he admitted; then with decision he added: "Let's go in!"

Together they entered. She was holding his arm tightly, not, as the young man in the office concluded, from affection, but to restrain him.

"What do you want?" the youth demanded.

"I'd like to buy that alfalfa land below the reservoirs," Vance said.

The clerk entered the inner office. "A couple of goofy married people want that alfalfa land," he informed his employer.

"Do, eh?" Pringle did not look up. "Ask what they expect to grow on it."

He returned to Vance and Edith. "Mr. Pringle wants to know what you plan to grow on it?"

"Spuds!" answered Vance shortly.

CHAPTER V.

PRINGLE.

SPUDS, eh?" Pringle reflected on the proposition. "Does he look like he had any money?"

"Looks like most ranchers and cowpunchers when they're dressed up," the youth said.

The area was planted in alfalfa. Pringle would take some money off the property, but he was not one to overlook a chance to take even a larger sum. He tilted back in his chair to mentally figure how much the traffic would bear.

A ponderous man of granite was Gus Pringle. He had made a small fortune out of the pioneer spirit of his fellows. They cleared the land he sold them, planted orchards, and even gave their lives, while he hovered over them ready to swoop down and pick the bones of their hopes when lack of money or the elements beat them back. He had quickly learned that the wife is often more anxious to establish a permanent home than the husband. He usually talked to the wives, therefore, confident that they, in turn, would influence their husbands.

"Send 'em in," Pringle ordered after first peering at the pair through a peephole.

Edith felt Vance's arm grow tense as they entered Pringle's private office. She clutched his arm even tighter, and something in the pressure seemed to soothe his rage. At that moment the youth and the maid were closer together than they had ever been before or would be for some time to come. As Edith's uncle had handled all the business when the ranch had been purchased, Pringle did not know her by sight.

"Be seated," said Pringle. His lips hardly moved when he spoke. He seated himself, and rested a pair of fat hands on the desk. "So you would like to invest in the Red Mesa country, eh?" he asked. "Well, there's none better."

"We're looking around," Vance said, when he dared to risk speaking. The lump in his throat persisted. He wanted to leap over the desk and smash the granitelike man to the floor.

"They all look around, then come back here," Pringle said. "Money can be made off potatoes. The soil is ideal. How much are you prepared to pay down?" It did not take him long to get to the financial angle of it.

"A couple of thousand dollars. Balance in three years," Vance answered. "But before I take the plunge, I want to find out something about the water."

Pringle smiled at Edith. "Your husband is a business man, I observe," he said. It was a stock remark, and it usually filled a bride with a warm glow. It was not only a compliment to the man she had chosen, but an indirect compliment to her ability to pick a winner.

Edith made no comment. Pringle resumed. "Every acre of land on the Red Mesa is entitled to a certain amount of water from the White Water Dam.

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While it is true that the lower orchards and fields receive a larger share, the upper ranches have the lake to draw from. You have seen Deep Lake, of course?"

"Yes," Vance McMicken answered.

"A beautiful body of water," said Pringle.

"When do we get water from the dam?"

"Usually, the first of the season," Pringle explained. "The lake water is a sort of reserve that is drawn upon after the upper ranches have used up their rights to the White Water Dam supply. They are really very well situated." Again he smiled on Edith.

"I have my own ideas about raising spuds," Vance explained. "I suppose I can have the water any time I really need it?"

"Yes."

"There's been some talk of a dry year. What do you think about it?"

"A false alarm. There is water enough for everybody," Pringle insisted. "But don't pay any attention to these ranchers around here. They're always kicking about something. Why, they even talk about me." He turned to the girl. "Mrs. McMicken, you are going to love this country. With a good home, a loving husband, and a ranch that will pay for itself in a few years, you are a very fortunate girl. Excuse me a moment, I'll have my secretary draw up a contract of sale."

On the face of it, the instrument was almost generous in its terms, but it was full of hidden teeth, as Vance saw at a glance. Unless all debts were paid the day they were due, Pringle had the right to step in and take possession. All improvements were to be regarded as liquidated damages. Vance signed it hastily. There were several clauses he did not want inserted, and he was afraid Pringle might think of them the last minute. But Vance appeared to be such a mild individual, and Pringle was so interested in including another victim in his land-selling schemes, that he let the agreement go as drawn up.

In high spirits the pair stepped into the fresh air once more. "I'm glad to be in the open again," Edith exclaimed. "Did you ever see such a grasping creature? Everything about his office was cheap. His secretary is one of these poor creatures who is afraid she will lose her job, and he can be depended on to keep her in that frame of mind. Even his hands are half clutching at things. You restrained yourself wonderfully."

"I almost tackled him when he stuck out his hand to me," Vance admitted.

"I held you back," she answered. "For a moment, I was afraid you'd go right after him. This way is really better. Revenge will be more complete, and it takes more brains to bring it about. What do you plan to do?"

"Organize the ranchers and get every man in the country to plant spuds," he said. "I'm going to get busy on the telephone. I want to get a good start before Pringle wakes up."

Three nights later every upper-country rancher met at the schoolhouse. "First," Vance said to them, "we'd better get acquainted. This done, we'll try to accomplish something."

It was a half hour before he got down to business, but once started, he wasted no time.

"What I'm going ot tell you men," he said, "will come as a shock to some of you, but you've a better chance to beat the game by learning the facts now." Then he not only told them what they might expect, but he proved every point. "And so," he concluded, "our only chance is to plant a big crop of potatoes and get out from under that way."

"Potatoes!" a rancher named Lundborg almost jeered. "Everybody planted spuds last year, and what hap-

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pened? We couldn't sell 'em. The best any of us got was five dollars a ton for hog feed. Don't talk potatoes to us! As for me, I'm ready to clear out of this country right now. If somebody would give me a thousand dollars down, cash money, he could have my place for ten thousand dollars, and at that I'd be cheating him."

"Do you mean that?" Vance demanded.

"Yes, I mean it! I see the handwriting on the wall. We're all licked, and spuds won't save us." Lundborg turned to leave the hall.

"I may be around to see you," Vance shouted. "I'll take your proposition if I can dig up the money."

"I'll be waiting," Lundborg said.

Vance turned to the others. "I've spent a week looking up government statistics on crops. They've never failed to prove that when prices on spuds are low, they're high the next year. The answer is simple—people won't plant them. The result is, the next season spuds are scarce and high. I'm sure if you'll plant, you'll clean up big. At forty dollars a ton, which is a mighty good price, we can clear up every debt these ranches owe and have some money left to develop a permanent water supply."

"Where'll you get the water?" a dozen men shouted.

"I figure that a deep well below Pringle's reservoirs will not only pick up the flow from Deep Lake, but will gather up a lot of extra water besides. It'll cost us some money for a pump, but once you get water on this land it pays big dividends."

The audience seemed to be impressed by McMicken's sincerity and logic.

"What makes you think you'll get water?" one of them asked. Vance did not object to the questions. Questions indicated that the others were trying to get at the bottom of the matter. And when they did, they would be with him.

"I haven't been a miner for nothing," the young man explained; "I know structures. I can almost follow the course of the water as it drains from Deep Lake into Pringle's reservoirs."

"Yes," one agreed, "but that don't help us this year. What are we going to do this year?"

"I don't feel that I should put all my cards on the table," Vance said seriously. "There's no reason why I should show my hand, and perhaps have a report of it reach Pringle. He might be able to beat my game. The element of surprise is important. He hold aces enough in this fight as it is."

"Fair enough," agreed several. That was all Vance needed—a few to back him. The others would most certainly follow.

"Forty dollars a ton would be a young fortune," one of them observed, "if spuds would grow all over the place the way they did in my back yard last year. Even twenty-five or thirty dollars would give me a breathing spell. So far, it seems like I'm only a jump or two ahead of the sheriff, and I'm sure gettin' out of breath."

"I've had an agreement drawn up by a good lawyer in Seattle," Vance explained. "You can look it over and sign if you want to. But the idea is this, we're all in it together. Each man shares according to his acreage. In case there isn't water enough to go around when the hot weather strikes us, some of the acreage will have to be abandoned, but the owner won't lose. It's better to have enough water for a small amount than not enough for the whole country. I'm saying this now so you'll understand."

Vance and Edith had an opportunity to study the others as the agreement was passed about and discussed. Pioneers, every one of them. The same grim, yet hopeful, expression that was on the faces of those who set forth in covered wagons, was present now.

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Fate had been unkind to every man and woman in the room. All were tired, but it was not the exhaustion of a hard day. It was the near-exhaustion of years of struggle with no let-up in sight. Not a man or woman in the room had enjoyed a vacation in many years. Always behind in their work; always paying out money the instant it was received; always stalling off creditors, it was little wonder that they were such easy marks for men of the Pringle type. Their eagerness for a period of rest; for something that was really theirs, blinded them to the tricks of the propositions offered them. It would have been as easy for Vance McMicken to have defrauded them as to have helped them. There were no tricky, hidden phrases in the agreement, though such phrases could have been concealed without difficulty.

Some signed; others wanted to think it over; but all agreed to say nothing of the matter.

It was a week before the last of the ranchers came into the fold. But once in, there was no halfway business. They were in to the finish. The Red Mesa Association was the name given to the organization, and Vance McMicken was naturally named general manager. Funds were pooled, and Edith was elected treasurer. She opened an account in a Seattle bank. It would have been poor strategy to have opened an account in the Red Mesa bank, where Pringle could easily have determined their strength by the amount of their funds.

In time, of course, the news reached Pringle's ears. The upper-country ranchers had organized and were growing spuds. This new man, McMicken, was back of it. He smiled to himself.

"An attempt to get into the clear," Pringle mused, "but it won't work. Nothing will save them as long as I control the water, as long as Deep Lake flows into my reservoirs and is dry just when they need it most. I wonder what this man McMicken's game is? Out to pick up what I've left, probably. I'll keep an eye on him. I should have paid more attention to him when he was in the office. At the time he looked like another sucker looking for some good orchard land.

"Spuds, eh? That explains why ranchers are poor. They won't learn by experience. Last year there were hundreds of acres of spuds within fifty miles of Red Mesa that weren't even dug. Oh, well, it can't affect me. Guess I'd better send out notices that the first run of water will be ready whenever they want it? Give it to 'em when the lake is full; keep it from 'em when the lake's dry." He chuckled and slapped his leg. "It's never failed to work out. And it's legal. The sheriff has to back me up when the ranchers get tough, whether he wants to or not." Again his chuckle filled the dreary room that served as his office.

From the day the first man signed the agreement, Vance had been too busy to worry about Craddock's return. In fact, he had about come to the conclusion that the man had been bluffed into remaining away from his family. Vance had threatened to shoot him on sight, and he had said it in a most convincing manner. At the time Vance had been in a mood to shoot the wife-beater.

But keeping the organization going fully occupied the young rancher's time. Most of the ranchers had an ample stock of seed potatoes, and these were treated with a corrosive sublimate solution to kill the fungi and bacteria on the skin that caused the various potato diseases. The ranchers worked in units. This proved to be the most effective way. When one ranch had been planted, they moved on to the next. The Lundborg Ranch, alone, was not included. Lundborg had made good his statement that he would get out of the country if some one would make him

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a thousand-dollar down payment. Perhaps the Swede was not as foolish as some people thought him. He would, at least, be a thousand dollars to the good, plus a year's care of the ranch during a tough period if the buyer failed to make good.

Vance would have jumped at the opportunity, but his money was tied up in the land he had bought from Pringle. Mrs. Craddock heard over the telephone that some one had bought the ranch. Vance rode over at once with the intention of signing up the rancher. The place was deserted; the small frame building that served Lundborg as a house was locked. Peering through the windows, Vance found the place was empty. Inquiry at Red Mesa developed that an agent named Crest was handling the property for the new man. And to Crest Vance hurried. The agent was a pleasant sort. He collected a few rents about the country, sold insurance of various kinds, and had a side line of water pumps, ranch machinery, and so forth.

"You don't need to explain your proposition," Crest informed Vance. "I know all about it, and I'm ready to sign up on behalf of my principal."

Vance emerged somewhat dizzy. "What is wrong?" Edith asked as he came out.

"Nothing! You see," he explained, "I've had a dream of every ranch in the upper-mesa country being planted to spuds. I want to have so many spuds planted that when the big buyers come along it will be worth their while to give us the top price and move their equipment in. I've been worried about the Lundborg place, fearing it would be the one blank spot in the country. So I prepared the selling talk of my life. Then I didn't have to use it. It sure left me with a flat feeling."

They rode up to the lake and looked over the country. The entire area was almost planted. Groups of men could be seen finishing up the Craddock place, and the following day they would move to Vance McMicken's land, which had been plowed and worked until even a novice could appreciate its perfect condition.

Seeing them, Pringle rode up. He always rode big horses. The smaller type quickly broke down under his massive weight. He was naturally lazy, and there was no "life" to his load. A horse tires sooner under a dead weight. Pringle nodded. "Howdy!" he said.

Edith reached over and squeezed Vance's arm. It was intended as a warning to hold himself in check. He understood it as such, and yet, to his surprise, he experienced a pleasant thrill. Working together for a common cause often changes people's viewpoint before they fully realize it. The girl's quick eyes saw the change pass over Vance's face. First she was surprised, then pleased over the discovery. So this indifferent person was not entirely immune to her charms. "Now that things are going his way and he's not quite so loaded down with responsibility," she told herself, "it will be fair enough for me to bring this bold knight of the mesas to his knees, if I can. And once I get him there, I'm going to take him apart and see what makes him tick. Huh! As if I could ever forget or forgive his 'Please, don't make the mistake of falling in love with me'! No, Mister Vance McMicken, not in a thousand years would I make such a mistake."

"You've accomplished a lot," Pringle observed, when Vance showed no sign of talking.

"I've done what I can," the latter grudgingly admitted.

"You've done something that has never been accomplished before," Pringle continued, determined, if he could, to fathom what was behind it all. "You've organized the upper-mesa ranchers into a unit."

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"That's the way to accomplish most," Vance answered. "We've got the whole country planted. If they'd been working alone they wouldn't have been this far along. Some of them wouldn't even have planted."

"You will be needing water soon?" Pringle suggested. When he mentioned water, Pringle experienced a warm glow. It was the club with which he beat his wealth out of a small empire.

"I suppose so. We'll let you know when we need it," Vance said.

"It is going to be a very hot summer," Pringle observed, "and you will need a lot of water."

"Yes."

"Of course, we might get a rain——" Pringle ventured. The feeling came over him that this man was not dumb, but that behind the terse answers a very active brain was meeting every move he made. If Vance McMicken could match him verbally, might he not also match him in the trouble that was certain to develop? "We do get rains sometimes during the hot spell, but not very often," Pringle added.

"I'm not counting on any miracles," Vance informed him.

Pringle rode slowly away, the saddle leather creaking under his weight.

Again the girl was serious. "You shouldn't be so short with him, Vance," she suggested. "You'll have him suspicious right at the start."

"I'm no hypocrite, Edith; I hate that fellow, with cause, and I can't pretend to be nice to him," Vance growled.

"I really wasn't suggesting that you be a hypocrite," she coldly informed him.

A warm smile came to Vance's face instantly. He put his hand on her shoulder. "I know you weren't suggesting anything of the kind, Edith," he said. "I'm sorry. I know you are above that sort of thing, but where Pringle is concerned I can't even be diplomatic. I'm counting the days when I can throw my hand down on the table and let him see the cards. I want him to know that it's what he did to old Pop that's brought this about."

"And you are doing it only for Pop? Not for the ranchers, or to give the Craddock children a better chance, or to help yourself?"

"Of course, I'm doing what I can for all of them; and you, Edith, have been so helpful that you top the list. You've sure lifted a lot of loads from my shoulders, telephoning this one and that, and talking to the wives of the ranchers who were doubtful."

"In working on the wives," she said, "I merely borrowed a page from Pringle's business code. But it's the only page in the code I'd use."

"But if I hadn't been on my way to kill Pringle on account of Pop," he explained, "I'd never have met you." More to himself than to her he added: "I sure owe you a lot. Killing would have been the stupid way of squaring accounts, though I'm still chump enough to feel like doing it. I can never get out of my mind the picture of old Pop lying across the table. But this way takes brains and, win or lose, I like it better."

"Win or lose?" she said, grasping the opening. "I thought you said there was no chance to lose?"

"There's always that chance when you're fighting a man like Pringle, because he's got money and weapons that we haven't; but I'm not letting that cramp my style any. The fight should get interesting later on when I come out into the open and tell him why I'm in it."

"Will you do that?"

"Sure! That's my revenge. And that's strategy, too. He'll think such a move is prompted by my confidence of ultimate success and it'll most certainly give him something more to worry about."

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CHAPTER VI.

A CLEVER MOVE.

THE telephone rang sharply in the Craddock house. As usual, Mrs. Craddock leaped to answer it. She always answered it, regardless of the number of rings; but when her own number was called she managed to put on an extra burst of speed in reaching the instrument. "Hello! . . . Yes! . . . Oh, you want Mr. McMicken! I'll call him."

Vance was in the back yard playing baseball with Jack Craddock . Since Vance's arrival, and with the help he gave about the place, Jack had had time to play for the first time in his life. Vance pitched one more ball, which Jack knocked into the orchard, and while the boy was hunting the ball, Vance ran to the telephone. "McMicken speaking," he said. He was as eager to get back to the game as Jack was to have him.

"This is Donovan speaking. I've got the forty acres south of you."

"Yes, I know you, Donovan," Vance answered.

"Crest, the man that's looking after the old Lundborg place, figures it is time to irrigate. I think it's time myself. What about it?"

"I guess you're right," Vance replied. "We're going to do our irrigating at night, though. The evaporation will be less. I'll turn the water on to-morrow night."

"You'll have to see Pringle, first. He usually arranges for it to be turned into the big ditch that comes down from White Water Dam. In the past, they tell me, it's been up to every man to watch out that the other fellow didn't steal his water. I don't feel that is necessary now that we're in the association. What do you think?"

"You are right. If one of the ranchers forgets himself, we'll throw him out on his ear and let him fight Pringle alone. I'll have Miss Craddock call the others on the telephone," Vance promised.

"Then you'll see Pringle?"

"Pringle nothing!" exploded Vance. "This is one of the aces I had up my sleeve. In the past, he's got the ranchers to use up their irrigation rights early in the season, and to depend on the lake for the late irrigation. We're going to cross him up this time. We're going to use up that lake before it seeps into his reservoirs. We'll be sure of that, then. Later on, we'll battle him for our rights to the flow from White Water Canyon."

Donovan was Irish and he possessed a sense of humor, naturally. His rich laughter came over the telephone. "That's a clever move, young fellow. I'd give a good deal to see the expression on Pringle's face when he wakes up to what you've done."

"That's a privilege I'm reserving for myself," Vance said. He hung up the receiver, and turned to find Edith smiling. "Are you laughing at me or with me?" he asked the girl.

"With you," she replied. "That is a masterful move, and it may be the difference between failure and success if water holds the key to the situation."

"We'll win if we can get the White Water Canyon flow we are entitled to. Pringle is no fool. The instant he sees our game, the fight will be on. This will jar him out of his mood of smug complacency and make him show his fangs." He stepped closer and caught her hands. "I'm glad you are laughing with me for a change. There have been occasions when I felt you were laughing at me. Edith——"

What he had in mind to say was not said. The triumph that had come into the girl's eyes disappeared as Mrs. Craddock came into the room. Perhaps it was well it did, otherwise the man must certainly have noticed it. As it was, both Edith and Vance flushed slightly.

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"I forget to tell you," Mrs. Craddock said, "but there's been talking back and forth all the morning about irrigatin' the spuds. They wondered, some of 'em, why you wasn't fixin' things up with Pringle. I was tempted to tell 'em to stop their worryin' about the water; then, thinks I, no, if I let them know I'm listenin' they'll stop telephonin' and commence writing letters back and forh, and then where would I be with a silent telephone line on my hands and us a-payin' the rate we do for service?"

She continued to chatter on long after Edith had left the house. Presently, she drew her chair up and grew confidential.

"I saw the look you gave Edith as you took her hands, Vance," she said. "Now, it's none of my business, you understand. I never mix into other people's business. I might listen in, but I'd never mix in. But if you're thinkin' of falling in love with the pretty creature, don't do it. It ain't her fault but she's that cold and hard she could love no man. She's of great determination, and if she felt love, or sickness, or even death, a-comin' on her, she'd fight it off. So, don't let yourself break your heart over Edith Craddock. She'd be worth it if there'd be a chance she'd fall for you, but she won't. And, besides, I hope you haven't forgotten what you once told her about not makin' the mistake of fallin' in love with you. Maybe you've forgotten it, but she hasn't."

Mrs. Craddock left the room, and Vance walked slowly outside to resume the ball game. Was it possible the regard he had for Edith was developing into something more serious?

The following day every man in the district made preparations to irrigate. Pringle, riding past, noticed what was taking place. "Nobody's called me on the telephone about water," he fumed. "This man McMicken is getting pretty self-confident. When he sends word, I'll make 'em wait a few days, just to show 'em who is running things around here."

He spent the evening at home, waiting for the telephone call that never came. While Pringle was waiting, Vance and a half dozen others climbed up to the lake and opened the gate. The brackish lake water gushed into the ditch, carrying the débris that had accumulated during the winter on its crest. All night it flowed, and men with lanterns stalked through orchards keeping the water in the furrows, clearing away débris that occasionally threatened to block the flow, and watching the thirsty soil absorb the precious fluid.

When Pringle awakened at dawn there was the damp, earthy odor that only comes when a district has been irrigated. He leaped to the telephone and called the dam. "You're through!" he bellowed at the caretaker. "You've been told never to turn on the water without an order from me!"

"I didn't!"

"You didn't? Do you mean to say that the water wasn't turned on last night?"

"Not a drop. You can come up and see for yourself," the caretaker insisted. His rather low-paid job was all that stood between him and starvation. He was worried, for he knew Pringle often discharged men without cause.

"I'll look into it," Pringle said as he hung up the receiver.

The caretaker left his shack as fast as his old legs could carry him. Under his arm he carried a telescope. When he reached the crest of the dam, he trained the instrument on the lower valley. The previous evening the ground had been brown and dry. Now it was a darker color, as though a heavy rain had fallen during the night. The old man chuckled. "There's things happenin' down there; mighty important things. For the first time the poor cusses are usin' some sense. They're irrigatin' with the water that usually seeps

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down into Pringle's reservoirs. And what'll Pringle say about that?"

Pringle was saying plenty at that moment. He dressed hurriedly, mounted his horse, and galloped toward the lake. As he burst from the apple orchards and got a view ahead, he noticed Vance McMicken in the center of his potato patch. Edith Craddock was galloping down the hill as if to join Vance. The young rancher was irrigating his spuds and preventing any of the water from going to waste.

The girl reached Vance first. "It struck me all of a sudden," she explained, "that Pringle might investigate and meet you alone, so I came on the dead run. Hang onto yourself, Vance!"

"I've been steeling myself for this. I don't think you need to worry. How are things down at the ranch?" He had not been able to do anything on the Craddock place, what with watching the flow from the lake and keeping track of his own land.

"Fine, Vance! I don't believe you appreciate the change you've worked in Jack. He's lost that hopeless manner that he had while waiting to grow up so he could whip his father. He regards himself as a man, and he is proud of the fact that he can obey orders. He obeyed every order you left to the letter. He ran the whole ranch last night. His mother and I followed instructions, and even Buddy handled a small hole until he fell asleep in a dry furrow. The water came down and soaked him, but he did not waken, so we—— Here comes Pringle!"

"Hey, McMicken," the big-man blustered, "what's the idea of using the lake water?"

"What's the difference? You said we had so much coming from the White Water Canyon flow, didn't you?" Vance rested both hands on the shovel handle and presented a picture of a man who has worked all night and is far below par mentally.

"All the difference in the world," exploded Pringle. He was thoroughly exasperated by McMicken's apparent stupidity. "Can't you see if you use up the lake water now, you won't have any in storage at the end of the season?"

"We'll still have our rights to the White Water Canyon flow, won't we?" Vance spoke softly and yawned. "You said, when I bought this place, I was entitled to so much water, plus the water in the lake, which belonged to the upper-mesa ranchers."

"Yes, I said that and—but if there isn't enough——" Pringle began to flounder.

"Stop right where you are!" snapped Vance, hurling the shovel aside. He was unable to contain himself longer.

"Easy," the girl whispered.

Vance did not hear her. He was moving slowly toward the man on the horse. "I came into the valley to kill you," he said thickly, "but this lady persuaded me it would hurt a cur of your type more to beat you at your own game and take something from you. She's right! Don't get scared, I'm not going to kill you! Death as she pointed out in her cool way, is quick and merciful. I don't want you to get off that easy. Remember Old Man Kelso—Pop, they called him? He was kindly, trusting, mellowed with age. He came to you looking for what he called 'An old man's home'! He was afraid of the real thing. He wanted an old man's home that he owned. You deceived him——"

"That's business. A man should do——"

Pringle got no further. Vance cried out as though in agony. The vision of old Pop eagerly believing the picture Pringle had painted, pathetically convinced that a ranch on the upper mesa would care for him in his declining years, was more than Vance could stand. "You were going to tell me a man should beware of what he buys. But not an old man who comes to you,

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as Pop did, and lays the cards on the table."

"Get back!" Pringle snarled. "Keep away from me!"

"Vance!" the girl cried. "Please!" She caught his arm, but he flung her hand off without realizing what he was doing.

Pringle's eyes grew cold and calculating. With a sudden movement, he reared his horse upward and turned him toward Vance. Like a flash, Edith hurled her weight against the animal's shoulder and threw him off balance. The descending hoofs missed Vance by a close margin. Pringle, realizing that his attempt to crush the man to earth had failed, and fearing Vance might be armed, spurred his horse and galloped across the potato patch. He rode with his body along the horse's neck as if fearing a bullet might come his way.

"Thanks, Edith," Vance said quietly; "if it hadn't been for you he might have got me. I wasn't expecting anything like that. But it shows what we are up against. He knows all the tricks there are to know, and, what's more, he knows the whole upper country is in this to a finish fight." Vance was still white with fury and breathing hard. "I wanted to get my hands on the cur, but I had sense enough not to try it. I knew if I touched him one of us would die right here."

He walked away, seated himself on a flume, and attempted to grow calmer. "I guess you might say we've drawn first blood, at that. We've irrigated our land with water he was counting on to fill his reservoirs."

"Yes, and we'll keep on doing it until the lake is dry," Edith declared with spirit.

"Of course," Vance agreed, "but the question is—can he stop us from taking our share from White Water Canyon? If he can, and do it legally, we're licked. But I don't think he can. I don't see how he can."

Together they watched Pringle disappear. He did not take the road leading to his comfortable home. Instead, he rode to town where, in the atmosphere of the office in which he had plotted so many schemes, he could figure ways and means to combat a well-organized plan to beat him. It was beginning to look as if his latest plan to exploit a hard-working group of ranchers might prove a boomerang.

Long he sat alone in silence. Presently he sent for his lawyer. "Is there any way I can stop those men from taking their White Water Canyon flow?" he asked.

The lawyer needed to consult no reports or codes to answer that question. "No. Any court would hold they had such rights. Your deeds and contracts of sale provide it."

"I know! I know!" Pringle growled. "But I have to insert such a clause to get the suckers to buy the land. Do you realize that if they get enough water for their potatoes they can pay off every cent they owe me, and the land is theirs forever? That crop has got to die in the ground or else be so poor they can't get anything for it. How shall we go about it?" He did not wait for the lawyer to answer. "Can we stop them legally. If not, then, I'm going to use force."

The lawyer had fought other legal battles for Pringle against outraged ranchers. His mind ran over the past. "Heretofore," he said, "the shoe has been on the other foot. They've used up their shares of water; the lake has dried up on them, and they've then tried to get more. The law has been on your side, Mr. Pringle; but this time the shoe is on the other foot."

"I don't hire you to tell me something I know," Pringle fumed. "How can we beat it? Tell me that!"

"I might enjoin them on the ground that public necessity requires a certain amount of water to be held in reserve.

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But before this is done, be sure that you take what you are going to need. No court will permit you to take water and stop them. The injunction will be absolute—no water can come from the dam. Then, by astute delays, we might drag the trial along until their potato crop is ruined. That's what you want to do, isn't it—ruin their potato crop?"

"Yes. And I'll tell you something else," Pringle said; "don't underestimate this man McMicken. The whole country laughed at him, called him a fool to plant potatoes when they were feeding them to the hogs last year. He can laugh, now. I've checked up on it. The department of agriculture has sent out a report of the acreage planted to potatoes. It is the lowest in years. Potatoes are going to be sky high." His eyes gleamed greedily. "If there was some way we could beat them without ruining the crop—I want that myself."

"Not a chance. You will do well to beat them. Leave the legal side of it to me," the lawyer said.

"Yes, and be ready to look after 'Pug' Whaley's interest, too," Pringle added. "I've sent for Pug."

"Don't inform me of such things," the lawyer said; "I don't care to know of them officially. But when Pug gets into trouble—if he does—let me know, and I'll do what I can to get him out."

A clatter outside caused Pringle to step to the window and look down into the street. A long-legged individual had stopped a four-horse team hitched to a wagon loaded down with machinery and pipe.

"Say," he was asking the packing-house superintendent, who happened to be passing, "where's the McMicken ranch?"

"Up there at the base of the reservoirs," the superintendent said, pointing. "What have you got there?"

"A drillin' outfit." The man paused and bit off a generous chew of tobacco. "I guess McMicken aims to drill for water on a large scale. Looks like he'd hit it, too. He's something of a miner hisself. Then he hires an expert to come out. The expert says it's a cinch. There ain't many places on this high mesa country that'll produce water, but it stands to reason if water flowed from them springs for hundreds of years it went somewhere. If we find where it went, McMicken won't have to worry about water as long as he's ranching in these parts. Thanks for tellin' me. I guess I'll move along." He mounted the wagon, yelled at the horses, and disappeared down the street to the tune of rattling pipes and machinery.

It looked as if Vance McMicken had made another swift and clever move. For several moments Pringle was stunned. As the trouble was mental, there was nothing the lawyer could do. Presently Pringle recovered from this blow.

"He can't get a well down in time to do them good this year," he exclaimed. "I can beat them yet. I've got to beat them!" He began pacing the room. "This is only the beginning. If those ranchers once find out the strength organization gives them, they will gradually grow stronger, and as they grow stronger I will weaken, until finally they'll drive me out of the country. Drive me out of my own country!" He paled at the thought. Then he shook himself. "I'm letting my imagination get the best of me. That's all for today. I want to think. I've got to plan. McMicken, with his sneaking, insidious ways, has made too good a start already."

CHAPTER VII.

A LEAD MESSENGER.

THREE days after the upper-mesa country had received the soaking of its life, there arrived at Red Mesa a silent individual. He did not need to talk to attract notice. His was a figure

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that would attract attention anywhere. His legs were long and slim. His feet suggested that he had grown along the ground for some time before shooting up. His chest was barrellike, and his shoulders deep, broad, and well knotted with muscles. His face reminded one instantly of a pug dog. A tooth or two, gleaming from his half-closed lips, increased the likeness. He lacked the asthmatic wheeze of the pug, however. His voice came from deep in his chest.

"Hello, Pringle," said this newcomer familiarly. "What the trouble now?"

Pringle gave him details, and the man listened attentively.

"Now get this, Pug," Pringle concluded; "I've found out a few things in the last two days. McMicken is the man you are to get. I don't care how you do it just so you get rid of him. This may help you. He beat up a man named Craddock, and told him not to come back. Craddock is a drunken loafer, but we might use him. He's been nursing his revenge for some time now. He's been seen in this district several times. Find him! Hire any men you need, and let me know the cost. If—ah—Vance McMicken came to a sudden end within the next few days, it would be worth a thousand dollars to me."

"It'd be worth more'n that to you," Pug snarled, "only you won't pay it. I'll find this Craddock gent, then see what I can do. Does this McMicken pack a rod?"

"I suppose so; cow-punchers usually do. And he's an ex-cow-puncher, ex-miner, ex-rancher, and——"

"And now you want him ex-tinct, eh? I'll be needin' about a hundred dollars to start in on. Thanks, Mr. Pringle. You'd be better to work for if you wasn't so tight. Ugh! A thousand dollars for killin' a guy that'll cause you a hundred thousand dollars' worth of trouble." The man's face twisted into lines of disgust.

From Pringle's office, Pug headed down to the railroad tracks. Here he met one of his partners in trouble making. "Saw the chief," Pug said. "He's tight as usual. Got a hundred off him. Know anything about a guy named Craddock?"

"Craddock? Big fellow, isn't he? Drinker?"

"That's the guy, Joe. Know where he is?"

"I can have him here in twenty-four hours," Joe said.

"Then go get him. I'm going down and look this McMicken bird over. Maybe he ain't as tough as Pringle thinks he is. See you here to-morrow morning."

He found Vance McMicken engaged in what appeared to be a rough-and-tumble fight with a fourteen-year-old boy. Near by, getting in a blow when he could, was a smaller boy. Catching up the small boy under one arm, Vance watched his chance. When the larger boy made a rush, he suddenly dropped his shoulder, then catching the boy on the shoulder ran toward the irrigation ditch.

Then a woman rushed from the house. "Here, Vance, you young scamp, don't throw the boys in the ditch! That water's for the cistern. I wouldn't mind if it was only Pringle's cistern to be filled, but it's for ours and all the rest."

Vance dumped the boys into a straw stack. "That's enough, fellows," he said. "If it wasn't for you kids, I don't know what I'd do when the going gets tough. You sure make me forget my troubles."

"Yes," Jack Craddock said quickly, "and you not only made us forget our troubles, you cleaned 'em out. Gee, Vance, you're a great guy."

Vance flushed as no girl could hope to make him flush. This compliment from the heart of a boy was the finest tribute he had ever received. "Just an

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ordinary fellow, Jack," Vance insisted. "The world's full of 'em."

But Jack was not so easily put off. "I guess, Vance," he said, "I'd do anything for you. I'd almost die for you."

"Thanks, Jack," Vance said. This was no time to answer lightly. It would be too easy to break the boy's heart. "But here's hoping you'll never have to do anything for me. If you feel under obligations some time and get the chance, help some kid out."

"I'll do that, Vance. Until you came I didn't think it was much fun being a kid. I'd see other boys with fathers—fathers that played with them like you play with us. I'd try to tell my father, but usually he was too busy or too—too—drunk. But I guess I hadn't better say anything more about my father." Vance swore softly as he saw the expression in the boy's eyes. "Still, at that, Vance, I kinda like him. I wish ——" He turned suddenly away and walked toward the canal. A queer sort of a whistle came from his lips as he walked. Vance knew there were tears in Jack's eyes and that he was whistling to keep from breaking down.

All this the watchful Pug observed. He shook his head. "I know that type of guy," he muttered; "he's dynamite at close quarters. It's best to work on his kind far away, or let somebody else do it. I can't figure why he hasn't killed Pringle. Unless—unless it's the kids and that girl." Edith had come out at that moment. "Pretty and cold-blooded as the deuce," Pug muttered. "She's going to cause McMicken a heartache before she's through with him. I get the idea now. Her ranch. She's in a jam, needs a man to fight for her, and is working McMicken. He's sap enough to fall for it. I've found out what I wanted to know. Guess I'd better clear out before somebody spots me. There's a lot of kids around this place—six altogether."

Several peaceful days passed. Vance had half expected that Pringle would attempt to stop his drilling, but nothing happened. The drillers had the rig in place and were ready to commence the actual drilling. As this was to be an event, Vance, Edith, and Jack were all present.

They watched operations for nearly an hour, then returned home, to find Mrs. Craddock in a high state of excitement. She said nothing, but it was apparent something was wrong. "Get rid of the kids," she presently suggested to Edith; "take 'em for a walk, all of them; Jack, too."

"What is wrong, Aunt Martha?" The girl was afraid Craddock had either returned home or threatened her over the telephone.

"Nothing is wrong, Edith. I want to talk to Vance."

Edith hurried the children away, confident she would learn details later. Her aunt was never one to keep important news from herself.

The moment they were alone Mrs. Craddock turned to Vance. "Somebody called up to-day and said you were going to be shot?"

"You don't say so," he said, showing no trace of alarm. "Man or woman?"

"Man."

"Did you recognize the voice?"

"Never heard the voice before, though it did sound kinda familiar when I got to thinkin' it over. It might be one of the other ranchers," Mrs. Craddock suggested.

"Oh, no," Vance replied, "they would have told me directly. I think it's an attempt to scare me out of the country. I don't imagine we'll hear any more about it."

"The person said for you not to get between the lamp and a window," she informed him.

"Now, that is interesting," Vance said. "That sounds as if the party knew what he was talking about." A

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killing might be mere talk or an idle threat, but when some one began discussing the best method, it sounded serious. Vance recalled his habit of sitting between the lamp and window, reading. Sometimes he pulled the curtain down, but often he did not. "Thanks," he answered. "I'll be on guard. Any more news?"

"Only that the owner of the Lundborg place is planning to build a house," said Mrs. Craddock. "He must have money to be doing such things. He never comes around, so he must be a business man somewhere."

Vance nodded. His alert ear had caught the crackle of a twig as it snapped under a human foot. He peered quickly out the window and found Jack against the wall. The youth flushed and refused to look Vance in the eyes at first.

"I know, Vance," he confessed, "you said it was wrong for us to listen, but I knew mother was going to tell you something—something dangerous—and I had to listen. I'll help you, Vance. I'll guard you so you can sleep nights or—anything."

"Don't worry, Jack," the man said. "I'll not be careless. Nobody will come prowling around, because it's too hard to get away. All the orchards are young, and there's not much cover. Now, don't worry about me. I'm not worrying about myself."

"You're the kind of a man that never worries."

The boy sauntered off. Vance watched him. He had a hunch this would not be the last of it. Jack was never one to admit defeat when he felt himself in the right. He merely dropped the matter and brought it up again later on.

That night he showed up shortly after dark. "Say," he protested, "I can see your shadow on the window just as plain. What's to stop somebody aiming at the shadow and killing you?"

"Last night they would probably have winged me, Jack," Vance explained, "but to-night I'm testing this threat out. You see, I've placed the lamp and chair at an angle. My shadow is on the curtain, but I'm not in the line of fire. Now, run along to bed."

Jack disappeared into the night. At the door of his house he hesitated, then quietly he slunk away to the vicinity of a small butte on the edge of the ranch.

Vance at first pretended to read, but presently he became interested in the story. An hour passed, then, without warning, the glass was shattered. A bullet thudded into a beam across the room. Vance threw up his hands and crashed to the floor. Once out of view of the window, he got to his feet, caught up his gun, and slipped out the back door. A brief glance from the embedded bullet to the hole through which it had come gave him the general direction.

He had covered less than a hundred yards when a gasping sound in the brush caught his ear. Vance listened, then crawled over to the spot. "Jack!" he whispered. "What happened?"

The youth was breathing heavily, but his face was crimson from some heavy blow. Vance caught him up and ran to his cabin with him. Cold water revived him. He blinked at the light.

"What happened, Jack, and what were you doing out there?" asked Vance.

"Figured I could see who it was shot at you, if they did," the boy said in a dazed voice. "When I said I'd die for you, I wasn't fooling. Right after the shot I heard a voice. Then the next thing I knew I got a smash in the face."

"Did you recognize the man? Did you see him?"

"I couldn't see him plain enough," the boy answered; "it was so dark."

Vance gave him a searching look. He was suddenly convinced that the boy was holding something back. "You

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couldn't see him, Jack, but did you recognize the voice?"

Jack wiped his face with the back of his hand. He started to speak, then set his lips. Misery came into his eyes. "Please don't make me tell, Vance. I might be wrong."

"You promised me you'd always come clean, Jack," Vance reminded him, "and for that reason I won't make you answer a question you don't want to."

Tears came into the boy's eyes. "Gee, you're great! If I was a girl, I'd fall in love with you. Gee! Oh, Vance, get out of the country before it's too late. Forget all about our darned old family; we ain't worth it!"

Vance slowly shook his head. "Let's forget it! Wash your face, and we'll go into the house. I'll tell your mother we were boxing or something."

"That won't work," Jack said; "she'll know you'd never wallop me this hard even if it was an accident. I can sneak in without being seen." The boy vanished.

Vance McMicken was alone. There was but one answer to the question. Jack in his loyalty had slipped out to catch whoever attempted to shoot him. He had encountered the man, and it was his father. No other man in the world could have silenced the boy where Vance's safety was concerned. One thing was certain—Pringle would stop at nothing to win out. Vance was an obstacle to be removed.

"Maybe he'll get me," Vance mused, "but I'll have the satisfaction of knowing things will go along just the same after I'm out of the picture. Time sure flies. Another irrigation is due. This should clean out Deep Lake." He grinned. "Pringle's reservoirs are low, too. I guess it'd be a good idea to demand our flow from the White Water Canyon now, so if it takes a court order to get it we'll have plenty of time to battle it out before we actually need it."

CHAPTER VIII.

NIGHT RIDERS.

A BLISTERING sun had been at work for weeks, killing all living things. Only that which water touched survived. Deep Lake had long since been emptied. For a time the air had been heavy with the odor of stagnant water and dying water growths, but even this had disappeared, and what had once been a lake floor was now cracked and baked. Vance's drillers had gone deep, but had not yet struck water. The whole upper country was still green, however, with potato plants. The ranchers were optimistic. They could not imagine defeat. Had not Vance McMicken whipped Pringle at every turn in the road? Had he not walked into Pringle's office and told him that the next time a Pringle man took a shot at him he was coming to town to take a shot at Pringle? Sure he had! And there had been no pot shooting at Vance since that time.

Nor could they forget another incident that had occurred. The day Deep Lake was emptied, Vance had gone to Pringle, with witnesses, and demanded the White Water Canyon flow. Pringle had said: "Come around when you need it and we'll talk business." Vance had just laughed, they remembered, and demanded immediate delivery. Pringle had said: "Try and get it!" And Vance had gone to court for it. They were fighting it out now; Pringle's lawyers delaying things as much as possible. No, they were not worried as long as the potato tops were green

But Vance was worried. Pringle's lawyers had delayed things too much already. It was well he had not waited until he had actually needed the water. He dug up a hill of potatoes on the Craddock place to see just how badly water was needed. "Pretty dry," he observed. "Can't go much longer. Two weeks at the outside. And what spuds!

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Just take a look at them, Mrs. Craddock!"

"Land sakes!" exclaimed the woman. "They'll be just the right size to bake in the oven some of these days."

"That's what I'm after," Vance informed her. "'Bakers,' as they call them, bring a top price. We've got thousands of tons of them on the upper mesa."

"And I heard over the telephone, gov'ment experts were estimatin' the price would reach forty dollars a ton for the best. Just think, forty dollars a ton! What'll the people in town be payin' for their spuds by the time the middlemen get their rake-off? On the strength of it, the man that bought the Lundborg place is going ahead and finishing it up. He must be married, what with the conveniences he's putting in. Just think of it, two bathrooms! And I'd give my right eye for one! There's an electric pump that forces water right out of the cistern. All you have to do is to turn a faucet, like you do in the city. He's putting in an electric heater for the water. Land sakes, if his family is large, what it'll cost them to bathe of a Saturday night! And an electric range. Well, that'll save some poor woman the backache of gathering fuel when there's nobody around and the wood box is empty."

Mrs. Craddock went on and on, leaving no detail of the finest home in the upper mesa untouched. Vance listened, as he had formed the habit of doing, but his mind was on other things. He assumed his lawyer was doing his best, but that best was not sufficient. The Lundborg ranch owner would have to scratch for his money somewhere else, or else not pay for his new home unless his spuds got water soon.

Vance headed for the county seat the following morning and called on Judge Pelky, before whom the case was being tried. "I don't know much about court procedure," Vance admitted, "and I don't want to be guilty of contempt of court; but if it's in order, I'd like to drive you up to the Red Mesa country to-morrow, or whenever you can take the time."

"Why?" The judge was a trifle cool. "Undue influence," and so forth, flashed through his mind.

"I want you to see the country for yourself. I'll show you the finest spud crop the Northwest has ever grown, and I won't mention a word about the case. In fact, I'll let the case rest afterward."

"I'd be very glad to see your potato crop," Judge Pelky said. Obviously, this straightforward rancher with the brick-red face wanted him to see things for himself. There was no reason why he should not.

And the next day he saw the green of potato tops as far as the eye could follow. "I'll show you the spuds," Vance said, and the judge saw not only fine potatoes, but nearly dry ground. He saw the dry lake, with its sun-baked bed, and he saw the big ditch coming from White Water Canyon, dry and cracked.

"Just when did the last water come down that ditch, Mr. McMicken?" he asked.

"Several weeks ago—when Mr. Pringle took his flow from the canyon," Vance said. "Water's a great thing in this country. You can see that everything is dead where it hasn't reached. But where it has reached, things are green. Water keeps 'em that way." And that was as near as Vance came to talking out of turn.

Within twenty-four hours Pringle and his attorney were called into court. The attorney had managed the affair with his usual cleverness. He had induced one of the lower-country ranchers to enjoin Pringle from turning on any more water for irrigation purposes, claiming that to do so would endanger the domestic supply and possibly result in hardship, and disease, and fire hazard. Thus, Pringle appeared to have

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nothing to do with holding up the water that the upper-mesa ranchers were entitled to. He deceived no one, not even the court. The injunction was dissolved.

"Now what?" said Pringle, as he left the courtroom with his attorney.

The attorney beamed. "Now, McMicken, *et al.*, will have to bring a court action against you to enforce their rights. And that should take time, a month at least."

It was Pringle's turn to beam. "A month will wipe them out completely. They've got to have water within a week. Some of the potato plants are getting slightly yellow already. Later on they'll have to have more water."

"All you have to do is to refuse, stick by your guns, and make McMicken drag you into court. What if the law does know your game? The judge can't act until everything is placed before him according to law. Then he just decides on the evidence before him, and not on what he privately knows. Let me know when the fireworks start." The lawyer left.

Within a few minutes after the lawyer's departure, McMicken, Donovan, and several other ranchers entered. "When do we get our water?" Vance demanded. "All court action has been cleared up."

"The injunction was dissolved," Pringle said smoothly, "thanks to your showing the judge your potato patch."

"And presenting a few government figures on water requirements, and what remains behind the dam," Vance snapped.

"I don't have to give you water until I am ready," Pringle informed them. "You have your remedy in court, of course."

"In court, eh?" Donovan groaned. "Give us a square deal, Pringle," he pleaded; "you know you'll be licked, but it'll be too late for us."

"And he knows that, too," Vance growled. "Come on, let's get out of here."

The others looked surprised and followed Vance from the office. "I didn't expect you to lay down as easy as that," Donovan observed. "What's the matter, Vance? Licked?"

"You don't have to make cracks like that to sting me into action," Vance retorted, "and you know it. We've got that water coming to us, and we're going to take it."

"Good! When?"

"As soon as I can make plans. Inside of forty-eight hours. You have your ground ready. We'll pull this off at night and run a full head of water so that if Pringle can stop us some way, legally, we'll at least have got our water. We'll telephone the other ranchers immediately."

Vance was in a cheerful mood when he reached the Craddock place. "Hello, Edith! Where's everybody?" he called.

"Aunt Martha loaded the children into a wagon and drove them over to the Lundborg place. The carpenters aren't working to-day, and she wanted to show them what a real house looked like inside, particularly the bathtubs, poor thing. If this potato crop comes up to expectations, I'll make a start toward building a real home here. Of course, that won't be as nice as if she owned the place, as if it were her own; but she'll at least have the conveniences she wants."

"You're a peach, Edith," Vance said. "We've been through a lot, haven't we? And I owe you a lot." He smiled down at her. "By the way, remember the day I heard you say, 'for two cents I'd do it'? And I gave you the two cents?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Did you ever do it?"

"I've started on the problem. Some day——"

"Let's forget it now," Vance said. He stepped closer, then impulsively took

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her hands. "You said something about a home, Edith. Go ahead and build one for your Aunt Martha and the kids. But let me build a home for you up on my place." He smiled. "I love you," he said softly. "Do you—love—me?"

"You once told me," she answered in a low, clear voice, "not to make the mistake of falling in love with you. I——"

She saw him make an effort at self-control. He succeeded. There were few things Vance did not succeed in doing these days. The constant fighting of Pringle and his schemes, and the schemes of the heat and pests that assail potatoes, had toughened him. "So I did, Edith, so I did." Then he walked over to his own cabin and closed the door.

Within, he paced the floor. "I've failed," he told himself, "failed! Hardship, the world, and Craddock have made Edith cold and hard; have clothed her with an armor. I thought I could break through. I've failed!" He saddled his horse and rode up to his own ranch so he would not have to face her across the table that night. Of the two she was far the cooler and would be at ease. He would be altogether too uncomfortable.

It was eight o'clock when he returned, to find the Craddock children filled with the wonders of a modern home. "Just turn the faucet," Jack said, "the water comes, and the pump starts! He's got a thousand-barrel cistern, too. Must expect to use a lot of water."

"And two bathrooms," Buddy informed him with awe. "Two kids could take a bath to once."

"That's great," Vance agreed. He talked to them until nine o'clock, then turned in, more to induce them to go to bed than because he was sleepy. It did not look like his night to sleep, nor was it.

At ten o'clock the door opened without warning. Vance leaped from his bunk and faced a six-gun in a steady hand. The man who held it was masked. "Get your clothes on!" he ordered, then stepped to the window. He lifted Vance's lamp and waved it up and down three times.

As Vance completed his dressing, several men were heard to gallop into the yard.

Mrs. Craddock came to the door. "What's wrong?" she asked. Jack bounded to the floor from the top bunk. His eyes were bright with excitement and worry.

"We're taking McMicken for a little ride in the hills. The sunrise is beautiful up there. We want him to see it. And that goes for any rancher who gets the idea into his head he can beat Pringle. It ain't in the cards. We know, because we hold the cards and know what's in 'em. You might call up the ladies in the upper mesa and tell 'em to use their best influence to keep their husbands to home."

The speaker was masked, as were the others; but a gust of wind eddying about the house flipped up the lower corner of the handkerchief covering his face. Martha saw the jaw and mouth of a pug-faced man. Jack noticed them, too. They ordered Vance onto a horse, placed him between two riders, and galloped away.

Mrs. Craddock broke down and cried: "It's all my fault! All my fault! Somebody called on the telephone. It was the same man's voice that warned me about Vance settin' before the window when the light was on. He said Vance had better sleep in the orchard t'-night. And I was so excited over that Lundborg place I forgot to tell him! And now they've takin' him out to kill him." Edith, aroused by the noise, was just coming from her room. But before Mrs. Craddock could explain, Jack was going out the door. "Jack! Jackie!

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Where are you going?" the woman cried in alarm.

"I'm going to pile onto Vance's horse and trail 'em," the boy announced. "I'll get to a telephone some way and let you know where they's taking him. You can tell the ranchers."

"Jack! Jack! They'll see you and maybe kill you," the mother moaned. "And you're all I got! You're the man of the family. Oh—Jack!"

"Now, don't take on, maw," the boy pleaded; "nothing's going to happen to me. I got reason to believe I won't be killed even if I'm caught." A shade passed over his face. "Yes, I got darned good reason to believe it."

"What do you mean, Jack? You know something you haven't told us." The boy ran from the house and a few moments later they heard him galloping at top speed through the night.

Mrs. Craddock and Edith dressed. The sudden ringing of the telephone jarred their taut nerves. "Answer it, Edith," Martha said. And that proved just how badly upset she was.

"Hello." The girl was cool, as usual.

"Let me warn you," a man's voice said, "that Pringle plans to dynamite the tunnel and stop all water from coming into the Red Mesa country. Tell the ranchers to take steps to stop it. Thank you." The instrument clicked in the girl's ear.

"Just like a voice from the beyond," Mrs. Craddock said in an awed tone. "It comes mysteriouslike when you least expect it. And he always knows what's going to happen."

"Owoooo! I'm scared," wailed Buddy, and his brothers and sisters joined in his cry.

"Don't be foolish!" Edith said sharply. "It is nothing. Only a man calling up. Some unknown friend who evidently knows what the enemy is doing. I'm going to do some telephoning myself. I'll start in with Mr. Donovan. That is a fighting name."

CHAPTER IX.

POWDER.

WHEN Pringle had refused to turn on the water and Vance had led the ranchers from his office, he knew that the men had not the slightest intention of appealing to the courts. He knew that they had determined to take things into their own hands, now that no injunction stood in their way. Whatever music there was to face after the potato crop had been saved would be faced. Thereupon, he prepared to meet them and, if possible, get the jump on them.

The swift attack on Vance McMicken had been his first move. It is always good strategy to get rid of a leader. There is a period of disorganization, then, that is often protracted. Either a suitable leader cannot be found or else two strong men fight it out for leadership. As soon as Pringle had set things in motion, he took the field himself. A storehouse in a butte just above one of his ranches yielded a quantity of powder. He noted with satisfaction that the drillers had laid off for several days until new pipe could be shipped in, and had left the well unguarded.

While his men were taking care of Vance, he made his way, unobserved, to the well. With considerable care he prepared a heavy charge, capped it, and lowered it into the well with the aid of two long electric wires. When the charge had reached the bottom, he ran the wires to a point of safety, attached a firing machine, and set off the charge. The only apparent result was a sullen jar, deep in the earth. He hauled up the wire and noted that more than fifty feet was missing. The damage had been considerable, if not visible. "They'll get no water from here for a while," he observed.

He returned to the powder house, fixed up another charge, carefully packed it, and headed for the tunnel.

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This charge would be fired only in case the ranchers got the upper hand. He had no desire to needlessly damage his own property, yet he would not hesitate if, by so doing, he could break the upper-mesa ranchers and once more get control of the land he had sold so many times to hopeful souls seeking to better their lot.

Pringle's men, under Pug, were doing their part, also. Vance eyed one of his guards with interest. Suddenly he spoke.

"Hello, Craddock, we seem to have met again!"

"Yeah, we have." The man removed the mask from his face. In the half light Vance could see that it was Craddock. There was no mistaking Martha's ponderous Dearie.

"Just what do they plan to do with me?" Vance inquired. "I'm naturally interested."

"Well," Craddock said, "it ain't quite decided yet. That's up to Pug; he's runnin' this show. I don't think you'll be exactly murdered. Bullet holes have a way of talking afterward. Pug mentioned some of taking you to the desert country the other side of Gunsight Pass, giving you a canteen of water, wishing you luck, and turning you loose."

"Turn me loose with a horse?" Vance inquired. Mounted, he might make it to a water hole he knew of.

"Yeah, he figures to let you have a horse," Craddock answered; "shank's mare!"

Pug turned and snarled: "Shut up, Craddock!"

"Yes, sir," said Craddock, and after that he was silent.

They rode until shortly after midnight, then made camp.

"We're out of sight of the world from now on and there's some pretty bad trail ahead," Pug explained; "we'll camp until daylight. Might as well take things easy, McMicken, while you can. You, Craddock, stand guard until two o'clock. Then call one of the others, and so on. That'll make it an hour apiece, except me. I need the sleep."

Vance decided the others needed the sleep, too. They spread their blankets some distance away and were soon snoring. Craddock lighted a pipe and stretched out on the ground with his head and shoulders propped against a pile of saddles and saddle blankets. He could watch the prisoner with comfort.

A half hour passed, and Vance suddenly felt a sharp stone strike his cheek. He opened his eyes and half lifted his head. A small hand signaled from a low clump of brush. "Jack!" exclaimed Vance, but it was an inward exclamation. "Might have known it!" He nodded to indicate he had seen the youth. Recognition had been more a knowledge of the boy's general outline than an actual view of his face. And Jack was the only one likely to follow him.

Craddock's eyes popped open. "What is going on?" he growled, and got to his feet. Vance's heart almost stopped beating. The big man was walking straight for the poorly concealed boy. It was not his own situation that worried Vance. It was the possibility of an encounter between father and son. Jack must have seen and recognized his father. Vance was certain it was this same father who had knocked the boy unconscious that night when the rifle bullet had crashed through his window. He was equally certain Jack knew it. He could appreciate the boy's agony as he lay there waiting.

Craddock finally decided all was well and returned to his resting place. Fifteen minutes passed before Jack squirmed over the ground and slashed the ropes binding Vance's hands and feet together. Vance waited until the boy had made his escape, then he quietly followed. The youth was somewhat shaky from his ordeal. "I guess you know now why I wouldn't talk that

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night. My father was with the men that took a shot at you."

"Yes, I knew, Jack," Vance admitted, "or at least I made a good guess. We'll forget it."

"Your horse is down here."

"Thanks. I think I'll slip back and get the one they brought me up on, also," Vance said.

"Let me go," the boy pleaded. "I'm smaller and make less noise."

A tense period of silence followed, then came the thunder of hoofs. The camp awoke with a start. Jack burst from the gloom, astride Pug's horse, and driving the others ahead of him. Vance leaped onto Jerry's back and followed.

Jack was in high glee. "That's slowing 'em up, eh?" he cried. "Every man afoot, and a long walk to town." He did not mention his father, but Vance knew that he had not overlooked his presence.

They rode slowly home, to find the place alive with mounted ranchers. Every kind of horse was present, from cow ponies to plow horses. The men were armed with shotguns, rifles, and six-guns. They were in a dangerous mood. "Hello!" greeted Vance cheerfully.

Mrs. Craddock rushed from the house and dragged Jack off his horse. She kissed him with feeling. "Jackie! Jackie!" she sobbed with relief. "After the smash in the face you got the other time, I thought they'd sure kill you this time."

"Gee, maw," the boy pleaded, "don't kiss me like this before people. They'll think I'm a little kid."

"You are just a kid, Jackie," she answered.

"Aw, thunder!" exploded the boy. "Ask Vance if I am!"

"He's a life-sized man, Mrs. Craddock," Vance said without waiting to be asked.

Pringle missed riding into this scene by the merest chance. He had gone slightly out of his way to look over the Craddock ranch and assure himself that his men had taken Vance. Instead, he saw Vance and Jack riding home. Jack was astride Pug's horse, and it was apparent to Pringle that all was not well. He tied his horse to a tree and worked his way along an irrigation ditch until he was within hearing distance. "And I sneaked up and cut Vance loose, then swiped the horses," he heard Jack Craddock say.

"And now, men, suppose we get something to eat, then strike out for the White Water Canyon dam," Vance suggested. "I don't know what plans Pringle has made to stop us, but, regardless of them, we'll go ahead and take the flow of water we are entitled to. But remember, not one inch more! We don't want to leave ourselves open to a charge of stealing water."

Pringle had heard enough. He returned to his horse, cached his dynamite, and galloped over to the Lundborg place. The telephone was in and connected, but there were no workers there at that hour in the morning.

In spite of the excitement about her house, Mrs. Craddock's alert ear caught the slight jingle of the bell as Pringle picked up the receiver. She motioned for silence. "It's Pringle's voice," she said. "He's on the line somewhere, and he's just asked for the sheriff." A hush fell over the gathering. Presently she hung up. "He's told the sheriff an armed party has gathered at the ranch and he's expecting trouble. The sheriff has promised to get a posse together and come up here."

The men looked at Vance McMicken for the answer to this question. "The old trick," Donovan growled, "working it so the ranchers look like lawbreakers, then he gets the law on his side! Well, law or no law, I'm going ahead."

"Here, too," said another.

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"I promised Vance and all of you I'd see this through to the finish," said a third, "and I'm keeping that promise. Let's go!"

"Just a minute," Vance pleaded. "Let me telephone the sheriff and head him off. I think it can be done."

He picked up the receiver and heard Pringle's voice just finishing a conversation. "Then you'll do that at once?" he was saying. The other party evidently agreed to the request. "That'll leave me free for now," Pringle concluded. "I'll join you later. The sheriff will clip their wings, so you needn't be afraid of gun play."

"Now, why wasn't I listening?" moaned Mrs. Craddock. "It's important things he's got in the wind."

"Never mind, Aunt Martha," Edith said, "it's the first time anything's got by you. You've batted a hundred per cent so far."

Vance had the sheriff's wife on the telephone by this time, and she had reported him as just leaving. "I'll try to catch him," she said.

Five minutes passed—the longest five minutes Vance ever experienced—then the impatient voice of the sheriff came over the wire. He was evidently out of breath. "This is Vance McMicken speaking, sheriff. It has been reported to you that we are armed and are going to start trouble. Never mind how I found out, that's the truth. I can assure you that we are going to do nothing we haven't the right to do."

"Then leave your guns behind," the sheriff said.

"Very well," Vance agreed.

"I have your word of honor on that, have I?" the sheriff asked.

"You have, sheriff. Every weapon will be left at the Craddock ranch. You can send a deputy to check up if you want to."

"I'll take your word for it," the sheriff agreed.

"What did you make a promise like that for?" Donovan growled, when Vance had hung up.

"It was the only way we could get rid of the sheriff," Vance explained. "At least, we have our freedom. If that old boy had caught us heading for White Water Canyon, armed to the teeth, he'd have herded the whole crowd down to jail. And he'd have caught us, too! He's one of the hardest-riding gents in this part of the country."

"I guess you're right, but we're at a disadvantage," Donovan said.

They gulped down some coffee, and then turned their horses toward the upper country. Vance was the last to leave. "You stay here, Jack, and in case any late telephone calls come in, light out after us. We'll leave a fresh horse for you." It was what Vance thought a clever way of keeping the boy out of trouble and particularly of avoiding a situation where he might have to fight his own father.

"What a fine friend you turn out to be!" Jack protested. "I want to see the finish." He sighed heavily. "But I'll obey orders and pray for a telephone call. And listen, Vance, most any call will sound important to me."

Vance grinned, then galloped after the others.

Prepared for the worst, no one was more surprised than Jack when the telephone rang. "Answer it, ma!" he cried.

Mrs. Craddock answered. "Edith," she whispered, "it's that mysterious voice again. The man that's always sending warnings."

The voice came clearly, but the speaker was evidently trying not to be heard by others near by. "Get this! Somebody just went into the tunnel carrying a pack. It looked like Pringle. McMicken should know about that."

"I'm off," Jack shouted. He did not wait to saddle, but headed across country on the dead run. Every time he could take a short cut he did. The horse leaped ditches, skirted buttes, and

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crossed potato patches, sending forty-dollar-a-ton spuds flying in every direction. It was a long, hard ride, the hardest Jack had ever taken, and only his light weight enabled the horse to overtake the riders. Vance, climbing a switchback up the same mountain that had been tunneled for the water, saw the boy coming far below him. He pulled up. "You fellows go on up to the headworks," he directed; "I'll drop down and see what the kid wants."

"Wait'll he comes to you," Donovan suggested, "and give your horse a rest."

"He's motioning for me to come down. See! He's pointing toward the tunnel outlet. Say! There's a horse cached in that clump of brush. Something's up." Ignoring the switchback, Vance descended the mountainside. A cascade of rocks and small boulders followed.

"Somebody's gone into the tunnel, Vance," the boy shouted. "What do you want me to do? Go in and see who it is?"

"There's no end to your nerve, Jack," Vance said. "No, I'll go in and look things over. Listen, you light out and overtake the others. Tell them to take possession of the big gate and not to open it or let anybody else open it until they hear from me. How did you get next to all this?"

"Some man telephoned," Jack answered, as he put his horse up the mountain switchback and began the almost hopeless task of overtaking those galloping figures so high above.

"Now, who is the bird who's sending all these warnings?" Vance muttered, as he started over the rough country for the outlet. "He's given us valuable information three times now. Hello! Here comes somebody else at a gallop!" He shaded his eyes a moment and decided the rider was Edith. "If she wants me, she knows where I am," Vance said. "I'm in plain sight until I get to the outlet, and nobody ever accused that girl of going around with her eyes closed. After this mess is over, I'm going to devote my life to trying to forget all about her. Chances are she's trying to overhaul Jack and keep him out of trouble. Poor kid, lined up against his father! I see where I have to give Craddock another trimming. Come to think about it, he looked pretty good the other night. Getting into shape to give me a lancing. By jingo! That explains it. He wasn't drunk, but thank my stars he was sleepy."

Jerry shot the last of his strength to reach the outlet. Vance dropped to the ground. "Take it easy, old hoss; you've done your part. Water? I know you're thirsty, but if all goes well we'll have a ditchful before night!"

He leaped into the ditch and squinted through the bore. Usually, one could see a small, round, white spot that marked the intake. Now it was partly darkened as though some one were walking, and swaying as they walked. First one side would gleam, then the other.

"Pringle!" Vance exclaimed, as he took another look at the horse half concealed in the brush. "He's taking a short cut. A man on foot could go through here and have a half hour to spare while mounted men were going over the hump on horses. That'll put him at the headworks before the boys can get there. Here goes!" Vance broke into a dog trot. He had covered nearly a half mile before Pringle noticed him. The man chanced to glance back and noticed that the lower end was almost blocked. Pringle listened a moment. The other was running. There could be no doubt of it now. He was being pursued. And it was probably Vance McMicken, but he decided to make sure. He cupped his hands to his mouth.

"Halt or I'll fire!" he shouted.

The other stopped. "Go ahead and

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fire, Pringle," Vance answered; "my men are at both ends of the tunnel."

"Vance!" Pringle spoke the word with satisfaction. "I've got him where I want him! Any time I touch off this blast, he'll either have to go back to escape, or run up to it to try to pinch out the fuse. No man's got nerve enough to do that. Ah! But I must wait until I can get near enough to the intake so I won't be caught myself." He sprinted for several rods, then dropped the package and lighted the fuse. The explosion would break the lining and drop down hundreds of tons of dirt, effectively blocking the tunnel until it could be cleared—a job that would take several weeks.

As the fuse spluttered, new life went into Pringle's tired legs. The fuse was long enough. He had ample time; but where powder is concerned every man wants more than ample time. He fairly shot from the tunnel, leaped from the ditch, and dropped to safety behind the bank. "Let Vance McMicken beat that game!" he snarled.

Vance's first warning was when his nostrils caught the scent of powder smoke. He had worked in mines too many times not to know instantly what it was. A single word escaped his lips: "Powder!"

CHAPTER X.

THE ROAR OF WATER.

THE first impulse of Vance McMicken was to turn and run. Then he realized that he didn't have a chance to escape that way. Long before he could gain either entrance the explosion would take place. In the gloom of the tunnel he made out the package and dived for it, intending to pull out the fuse. It was heavily wired, and somewhere under the wire the fuse was burning. He tore at it feverishly, but the job had been well done. Any instant it might explode. He hurled it as far toward the intake as he could, then he turned and ran in the opposite direction. The nearer the charge was to the open country beyond the intake, the less the force.

No man ever ran faster than Vance did then. Each stride was just that much margin between life and death. A tremendous roar suddenly filled his ears; a rush of air shot him through the tunnel like the bullet in a rifle. Blackness engulfed him. Weakly he struggled, the instinctive movement of muscles set in motion, then he crashed to the tunnel floor. Powder fumes crept through the darkness, searching this way and that, seeking a victim.

In the open, Pringle stretched himself and smiled. "It's all over but covering up the evidence. Queer, but the explosion didn't sound so loud out here." He looked high above him. At the headworks, men were leaping from exhausted horses and rushing toward a second group of men. Well down the trail a youth was whipping a horse to greater efforts. The horse had once been black, but now he was gray with lather and dust.

Again Pringle smiled. "Once more," he said softly, "they've tried to beat me—and failed. But it's just as well for me to leave the country for a while. Let my lawyer and the sheriff throw the ranchers out—that's what they're paid for."

Above him, Donovan was leading an attack against an equal number of men defending the big gate that stopped the water from flowing into the main ditch. The leader was soon naked to the waist. His shirt hung around his hips in shreds. He saw Pug and Craddock. Evidently, Pringle had hurried horses to the men Jack had left afoot. It was not a free-for-all fight. A man hit any enemy in sight, and sometimes walloped a friend by mistake. Several men were unconscious on both sides. Pringle picked good fighters, but the ranchers were not hired to fight as were Prin-

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gle's men. Behind their blows was the flame of fury. Each was fighting for his all.

Craddock was at his best in a fight of this sort. He could get in clean blows. Suddenly he swung at a rancher and missed. Again that ponderous fist made a hook. It struck Pug squarely in the face and the leader dropped as if he were shot. Donovan roared with laughter. "Knocked his own leader out. Come on, boys, up and at 'em!" Fighting inch by inch, Donovan reached the gate. His big hands gripped the wheel and began to turn it. While his fellow ranchers held the enemy back, he opened the gate wide. Water roared into the ditch—clean, cold water—life to mankind and plants alike. Led by Craddock, the enemy suddenly retreated. Over the ridge they ran to their horses, leaving a number of unconscious fellows behind them.

On the trail below a horse had dropped from exhaustion and a sobbing youth was coming straight up the rocks, shouting: "Shut it off! Shut it off! Vance is in the tunnel! Oh, why don't they shut it off?" But the roar of the water drowned Jack's voice. No man saw him reach the top; no man saw him look at the tunnel intake choked with the water and débris of the ditch. "Too late! I'm too late!" The boy went deadly white as even his stout heart failed a moment under the strain.

Donovan was the first to see him. "Get some water, quick; the kid's showed up, and he's fainted dead away! Something's wrong, or he wouldn't be here. Vance sent him."

"His black horse is down on the trail—out!" another shouted.

Far below them, Pringle watched the water rush into the tunnel. Air hissed out in great bubbles, then the flow stopped. "Blocked completely. There's no current." But presently the water began to stir slightly as some of it worked through. "Better so," Pringle whispered; "the water will finish what the powder started, in case McMicken is only stunned." He started slowly down the steep mountain. It was a long walk to his horse, the outlet of the tunnel, and what the water might bring from that long, dark tomb. He had better take things easy and kep under cover.

As Vance had guessed, Edith had been sent out to ride herd on Jack Craddock, and keep him out of trouble—if possible. She had not seen him riding up the switchback, but she had seen Vance riding toward the outlet. When she reached the spot he had gone in, she started to follow, when suddenly she was knocked violently backward. The soft sand at the outlet saved her. The roar of an explosion filled her ears. She pressed her hand over her eyes and her senses cleared. "Vance is in there!" she exclaimed, and commenced running. Powder fumes all but drove her back. She grew faint, but pressed on. She was choking when she finally stumbled over Vance's unconscious form. "He's dead!" she cried. "They've killed him!"

And now came a new sound. The hiss of air in the darkness beyond. She did not know it, but the water had reached the rock and débris blocking the tunnel. The air pressure was blowing out the soft ground and small rocks. A jet of water squirted through. It was thick and muddy, but what followed was clear. It eddied about the girl's ankles and climbed to her knees. She clung to the man, holding his head above water, moving with the water when she could. The fumes had taken a deep toll of her strength. Twice, Vance's head went under, but she pulled him up. It was waist-high now. And suddenly she was swept off her feet. Half swimming, fighting to keep Vance's head up, she was carried a quarter of a mile; then abruptly the

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water dropped, the bore was clear, except for a muck ankle-deep. The air was pure.

She dropped beside Vance, gasping. Long she remained there, his head on her lap, her back against the tunnel wall. She was aroused by some one calling his name. "Vance! Vance!" It came down the tunnel, echoing and reëchoing like a voice from some other world. It was not human, but it was distinct. It came again, the voice of a half-frightened child. "Vance! Oh, Vance! Where is he? Oh, where is he?" It ended in a sob.

"Jack! Here we are! It's Edith!"

Jack came stumbling out of the darkness. "They shut off the water finally. I had to pass out just at the wrong time! What a fine sissy I turned out to be!" he said in self-disgust. "I came down the ditch on a board. I crawled through the boulders blocking the tunnel, then I ran. Nobody saw Pringle or Vance come out, so we figured they must be in here. Get a hold and we'll drag him out."

Vance was in the open when he regained consciousness.

"Do you feel better now?" Edith asked.

He saw her lips move, but he did not hear a sound. "I think my hearing's gone," he said. "Say something."

Edith's face was white, Jack's tense and gray. "Can't you hear us, Vance?" the boy said.

"No. Pringle blew things up. Get my horse! Get me back home. I've got to think. Pringle stopped the water," the rancher muttered.

"Yeah, but it's all right," Jack said. "That reminds me!" He borrowed Pringle's horse and galloped into the open country, stripped off his shirt, and waved it. The answer came high above him, where a man stood on the crest of the dam, watching.

While Edith was catching and saddling Jerry, Vance watched the tunnel. Presently, water roared forth. It was but half the normal flow, but it was at least getting through. The men would keep it running until they had used up their share, if it took a week.

Mrs. Craddock was on hand to greet the party. "Land sakes, it's a sweet sight to see all of you back here again, safe and sound!"

"Vance has lost his hearing," Edith explained.

Mrs. Craddock's sympathy was evident. "Now, isn't that too bad! I don't know what I'd do without my hearing, what with the way people use telephones nowadays. So much happened this morning, too. They've taken a load of furniture to the Lundborg place. The people will be moving in soon. Lucky woman, with all the electricity and two bathrooms. And two young men are here to buy the spud crop. They offer fifty dollars a ton right in the fields, providing we can get this irrigation water and the next."

Buddy came in, all excitement. "They've got a man, and a rope's around his neck."

Jack dashed out, then dashed in. "They're hanging Pringle!" he exclaimed

Edith scribbled a note and held it in front of Vance's eyes. "We can't have that," he cried. He rushed from the house and mounted Jerry.

Pringle, gray as death, was standing on the seat of a wagon. A rope ran from his neck to the limb of a cottonwood tree.

"That's got to stop!" Vance cried. He could see the men were in a desperate mood. "I'm all right, and the man's whipped. Bring him down to Craddock's house." Then he turned hurriedly away before they could ask him questions and learn of his loss of hearing.

"We heard you'd been killed in the tunnel," Donovan explained. "We'll bring him down."

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The two young men who wanted to buy every spud in the valley at fifty dollars a ton were on hand. Spuds would go higher, but they were entitled to a profit if they took that chance. Any other time they would have been greeted with open arms, but now they were shoved into the background.

There was no room in the Craddock house for so large a gathering, so every one moved outside. Mrs. Craddock kept an alert ear toward the telephone. The big children were told to clean up the little ones. Presently the children trooped out, each plainly showing where the cleaning had stopped.

One of the young men finally pushed himself to the front. "We'll give you fifty dollars a ton for your crop," he said to Vance.

Vance said nothing. He was waiting for some one to write down the words so he could read them. The young fellow misunderstood. "Fifty-one dollars," he said. Vance shook his head. "Fifty-two!" offered the young man. Vance shook his head again and looked for Edith. She was coming with pencil and pad. "Fifty-five dollars a ton in the field," the young man shouted, "and that's as high as we'll go."

The girl wrote down the offer. Vance lifted his brows. "We'll take it," he said.

"Provided," the young man said, "you complete this irrigation, and one more. That will be enough. Too much water toward the last is bad. The spuds don't stand handling so well."

Again the girl carefully wrote down the words.

"I can promise you water," Vance said.

"No, you can't," Pringle shouted, making a last stand now that the ranchers had cooled off slightly. "They'll use all their water up right now. There'll be none left—not an inch."

"Vance can't hear," the girl explained. "We hope his loss of hearing is temporary. That's why I have to write everything down."

The buyers looked at each other, and one of them groaned: "And I mistook his silence and jacked up the price!"

"There goes the phone," exclaimed Mrs. Craddock, rushing into the house. She presently returned and placed a note before Vance. He smiled.

"Yes, gentlemen," he said, "I can promise you water from my well."

Pringle started violently.

Vance continued: "A study of conditions here convinced the expert and myself that a large flow of water could be obtained by exploding a charge of powder in the well and shaking things up. He pointed out, however, that in exploding this charge Pringle's reservoirs might also open up, due to a general fracture of the rock. This would naturally result in a heavy damage suit. Knowing Pringle's methods fairly well, we left the well unguarded last night, but watched Pringle. He ran true to form and attempted to destroy our well.

"I have just received a report to the effect that the reservoirs are now dry, and that a temporary pump rigged on the well has failed to lower the water in the slightest. You are assured of all the water you want for the final irrigation."

He turned to the ranchers. "The shoe is now on the other foot, gentlemen, and it fits nicely, doesn't it? We not only have our normal supply from White Water Canyon, but the lake as well. And the water that has heretofore trickled into Pringle's reservoirs will go right through to our water sands, there to remain until we are ready to pump it out. It strikes me there are going to be some rare bargains in mature apple orchards next year.

"Turn Pringle loose, boys. No, I won't even have him prosecuted for trying to blow me up. Once, a very wise little girl told me that living was often

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a greater penalty for a crime than death. And Pringle will understand what she meant when he sits by and watches his grip on this land slip bit by bit in the days to come. If you two young men will come inside, we'll sign up the potato contracts."

A degree of quiet had settled over the Craddock household. The ranchers had gone home to tell their wives the good news and to consult mail-order catalogues. Jack was sprawled out in his bunk catching up on sleep. The morning had been a hard one for him. He was totally exhausted. From time to time, Mrs. Craddock peered out of the window. She had heard over the telephone that the people who owned the Lundborg ranch would probably move in during the day. To reach the ranch they must pass the Craddock house.

The telephone rang again. Mrs. Craddock did something she had never done before. She looked at the instrument and hesitated. She sighed: "One can never tell." Then she walked over to the instrument and listened for several moments. Her expression changed from interest to a fixture of fear and excitement. She hung up and slumped down into a chair. "I don't know whether to be happy or sorrowful," she announced. "It's Dearie. And he's coming home."

Jack woke with a start. "He is, eh? Well, I for one certainly don't want to see him."

Vance shot the lad a quick look and shook his head. Edith had scribbled Mrs. Craddock's information for him, and he guessed what Jack was saying by the expression on his face. The boy's shoulders slumped, as though in defeat.

"I'm sorry, mother," Jack said. "Maybe he's changed." In a half whisper he added: "Oh, if he only would change—sometimes! But he can't. And maybe that's why I should be sorry for him."

Vance smiled. "So Craddock is coming," he said in a low tone to Edith; "well, he could never catch me at a better time. I can't put up much of a battle to-day. I'm hurt all over, but at that I won't back down."

Hours passed. The new people had not moved into the Lundborg place yet, but the darkness of moisture was spreading over the land. The caretaker at the dam, waiting for the sun to set, could see it. Already the tinge of yellow appeared to be disappearing. The water had reached there none too soon.

A buckboard drove up to the Craddocks' and stopped. It sagged on one side from the weight of a very heavy man. The new arrival beamed on the children.

"Hello, kids! Got some candy for you. Here, Jack, here's a ball."

"I don't want the ball," Jack said in a low tone. "I don't want anything from you, even if you are my father."

Craddock merely smiled. He was dressed in a new suit of clothes and his shoes squeaked. Mrs. Craddock could not recall when a Craddock shoe had squeaked from newness. "Dearie!" she cried, and the past was all forgotten. A dozen times she had forgotten the past in her sad life with this man. Such is the forgiving spirit of woman! "Dearie! You look grand." Then, realizing her own appearance, she hastily brushed back several strands of hair. "You look ten years younger."

"I feel a dozen years younger," said Craddock, "even twenty years at times. What's everybody doing?"

"Just resting and waiting to see who moves into the old Lundborg place," Mrs. Craddock explained.

"Let's go over and take a look at it before they get in," Craddock suggested.

"That'll be wonderful. I haven't seen it since the furniture was moved in,

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what with all the things that's happened to-day and the telephone. Come on, children." Martha kept looking at Craddock as though he were a stranger.

"And speaking of the telephone," mused Vance, "one thing hasn't been cleared up. Who was the particular friend who tipped us off at the right time? Well, he'll show up. Craddock doesn't seem to have seen me yet."

The big man turned at that moment and saw the young rancher sitting in the corner. He lifted his brows slightly. "Hello there, McMicken," he said.

"Mr. McMicken can't hear," Edith explained; "the explosion injured his ears. The doctor is coming when he can." She lifted her voice and shouted: "Can you hear me, Vance?" The young man did not answer.

"Too bad," said Craddock. "Coming along with us, Edith? You might as well. Bring McMicken along, too. He might as well get a look at this furniture."

The Lundborg door was closed but unlocked. The furniture was in place, and the house had been swept. The visitors wandered from room to room, but Mrs. Craddock kept her longings to herself. No need of spoiling Dearie's home-coming by appearing envious. They ended in the living room.

"Like it?" Craddock growled, looking away.

"It's heaven," said his wife.

"I'm glad you like it," he said in a choked voice; "it's yours. We're the people moving into the old Lundborg place."

"Dearie! The runnin' water—the sink—the electric stove—all them nice, new, clean beds, and two bathrooms—is mine?"

"Sure!" he said, and tried to be careless. "Sure!"

"Oh—Dearie!" Martha threw herself into his arms and commenced to cry. "No packin' water, no rustlin' wood for the range,, and two bathtubs—— Oh, dear Dearie!"

"Now! Now!" the big man muttered. "Whatcha cryin' for? You see, it's like this. It wasn't the beatin' up McMicken gave me that changed me. It was the way he compared me with other fathers. I didn't think I had any pride left, but I guess I had some. It got under my skin and I brooded a while. I wanted revenge, then finally I thought less about revenge and more about what he'd said. I pulled my freight out of the country.

"Then, when I got a hold of myself, I came back. I was going to lick McMicken and start over again, but that seemed the wrong way to start. I heard about the Lundborg place, and it looked like a big chance. I had a friend who once offered to stake me if I'd lay off the moonshine. I convinced him I was through, and he staked me. I bought the place through Crest. Then I got a job. I wanted to be sure of myself before I showed up.

"Pug heard McMicken and I had fought, and figured I was out for revenge. He figured wrong. I was one of the ranchers now, and with the rest of you. I let Pug think I was tough, and I looked it, then. I saw they'd planned a lot of crooked stuff, so I went along with 'em to do what I could for my own crowd. I played the game to the finish, even when Jack saw me. I was the one who telephoned at different times. And when I was standing guard over McMicken last night, I was all set to tip my hand and turn him loose if he didn't get loose himself. Then I saw Jack sneaking up and I pretended to go to sleep and let him have the thrill of freeing McMicken. It was Pug who hit Jack that night.

"But it was no accident to-day when I laid Pug out cold with my fist. I'd been waiting for weeks for that chance. And now, I guess that's all, except—— Come here, Jack. Before all of you I

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want to apologize for not measuring up in my son's eyes as I should. Give me another chance, Jack, and I'll try."

"You don't have to try, dad," the boy said; "you've made good right now. Gee, you're great! Still got that ball I wouldn't take? Good, let's go out and use it while mother is trying out her new electric stove, the running water, and the two bathtubs."

Edith scribbled a note to Vance.

Let's take a walk somewhere. Right now we are out of the picture. I do hope your hearing will get better soon; there's so much I want to say, and I'm such a poor penman.

She walked along beside him in silence. The apples were coloring up now. There would be a few boxes to the acre, just a hint of what was coming.

"And we've all changed so," said Edith suddenly, as if thinking aloud. "It's the struggle that brought out our real selves and banished the sham. No wonder frontier people don't make false valuations. They don't dare. And there was a time when I warned Vance there was to be no romance! And he quickly warned me against falling in love with him. And—— Oh, darn it all, I'm sorry I was catty that time when he told me he loved me and mentioned that house on his ranch! The doctor says his deafness is only temporary, and that he will hear again in a few days, but it's such a long time to wait. A girl doesn't want to write that she's in love with a man. She wants to snuggle up close and tell him so he can hear it."

Vance's arm went around her. "Snuggle up close, sweetheart, and say it," he said. "I think I can hear it."

AN EXPERT REPTILE CATCHER

THE wish to catch something seems to be inherent in most of us, and it is probably derived from our earliest ancestors, who had to "catch" if they were to survive. Fortunately, the need is not so great with us, and a man may become a specialist in catching as he would in any thing else. One branch that is not likely to become overcrowded is that of capturing reptiles alive. This dangerous sport is practiced by a reptile expert of Long Beach, California, his specialty being diamond-backed rattlers. The equipment seems simple enough, but doubtless the man's skill is unerring. A forked stick and a noose are his weapons. The reptile is pinioned with the stick, the noose is then dropped over its head, and it is taken home to have its venom extracted for medicinal purposes.

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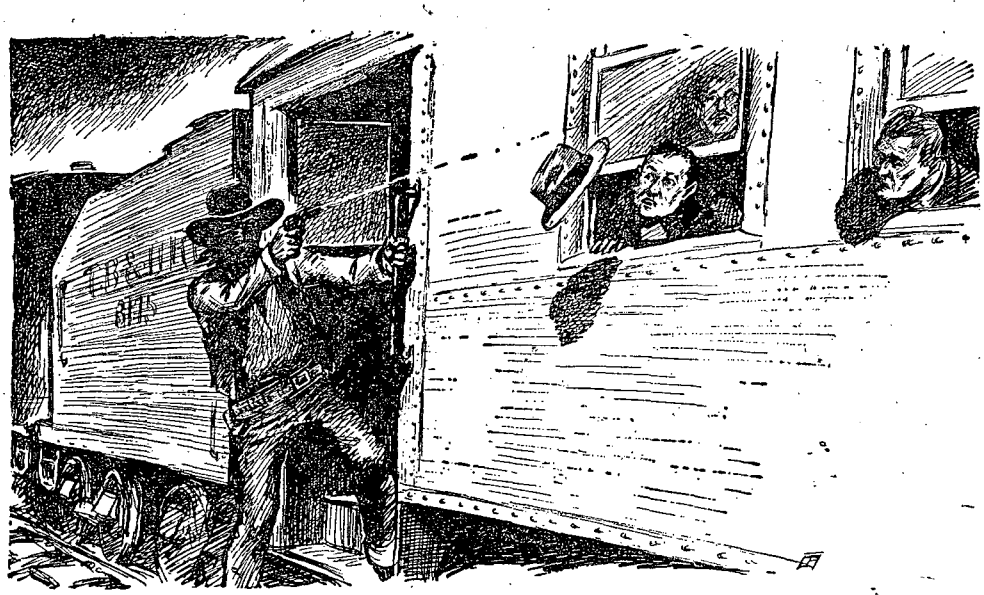

Turned Right

By Guthrie Brown

Author of "Hungry," etc.

THE eyes under the black-silk handkerchief gleamed with an oddly vivid light. It might be satisfaction, it might be laughter; but the engineer and fireman put up their hands in the solid conviction that it was murder.

"Chet," the tall highwayman called into the darkness, "keep these two covered while I go down the line. Everybody there? What's that?" He paused, turning his head to listen as he backed down the cab steps; and the engineer and fireman thought they heard an answer. "O. K." The bandit nodded and disappeared, while the two held their arms aloft and shivered in the chill of the spring night.

The express messenger translated the glow of the dancing eyes under the wide, gray sombrero just as the first victims had; and without hesitation he delivered a small black box and seven registered packages.

"Put them all in that leather pouch!" ordered the masked man, a sudden ripple in his tone. "More convenient to carry, you know. Thanks! 'Red,' you there?"

The messenger thought he heard an answer, and when the black mask had disappeared there was a quick mutter of question and response from beyond the express car. By this time heads had begun to protrude from windows and vestibules of the halted train. A bullet winging down one side of the cars, followed in a moment by one down the other side, erased the heads.

The day coach yielded little, the chair car maybe twice as much, but the three Pullmans were a good haul. It was necessary to waken a number of passengers; but the tall man in the dark-leather coat, whose spur chains jingled

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softly on the matting, soothed their fright.

"Take your time, gentlemen. No need to be scared. Only"—the voice rippled again—"the train is well guarded. Don't try anything foolish—— There is no point in crying, madam. We never deal with ladies. Matt"—he lifted his voice and it rang with peculiar penetration along the aisles—"all set?"

He bent his head to listen. The passengers thought they heard an answer as he nodded; and they dug hastily into bags, and wallets, and pockets, then sank back and pulled their blankets or coats tight about them and thanked Heaven that they had actually escaped with their lives.

At last there came a gentle hail from the rear of the train.

"Chet! Ease away! Watch the end here. You"—the black handkerchief suddenly appeared at the steps of the engine cab—"your lives won't be worth a soap bubble if you stop this side of Ladd's Junction. I'm on horseback, but—my men are not." He chuckled. "Vamose now! And thanks a lot!"

He waved a commanding hand, and the engine crew fell promptly to work.

Ten miles beyond the scene of the holdup a brakeman crawled forward over the coal in the tender and showed the two a slip of paper.

"Pinned to the conductor's coat tail!" he announced above the racket.

The engineer took the slip gingerly. In the middle of it was a large S. On each side of the letter was a small drawing, the first of a stooped man, hand to forehead, progressing with the utmost stealth, and the second of the same figure in full flight. The engineer grinned in spite of himself. How on earth, he wondered, could any one get such action into one round dot and six or eight straight lines?

"That damned renegade!" he yelled. "He's 'way out of his territory. How come he's so far north?"

The brakeman shook his head, and the fireman surmised, tapping the S.

"That bird has happened to some bad news this trip."

"Why?" demanded the brakeman.

"'Cause he pulled his play in Custer County, and they got a sheriff here that's pure dynamite."

"Haw!" growled the engineer, his grizzled brows arched. "In this year of 1915? No, boys, they don't make that kind of sheriffs any more. Just a bunch of fat remittance men, that's all officers are these days. Did I ever tell you about the time——"

The brakeman hastily beat it back over the coal, and the fireman banged the furnace door. The engineer put his head outside and grinned in the teeth of the wind. He knew how to clear his cab.

Lowering, velvet-black the night, muffling sound, closing like water on a pebble behind the fleeing man. San Gilray had been taught weather signs by an old Navajo woman. By the time the cut telegraph wires were repaired, and the news of the holdup abroad, a pouring rain would have obliterated every betraying track, and San himself would be secure in the fastness of the Carlos Mountains. He chuckled as he rode, his tall figure swaying easily to the movement of his running horse, his hand reaching back occasionally to make sure that the pack behind the saddle was secure.

A light glowed fitfully before him in the rising wind, and a raindrop struck his face.

"That's Beal's place," he told himself. "I'd better stop at the old spring cabin and sort this out. Gopher, where's that piece of candle?"

Gopher had no attention to give the question. All of his was absorbed in keeping his footing on the uneven trail up which he had turned.

Ten minutes later the horse rested

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outside a deserted log hut, while inside San made neat piles of yellow and green bills. The mask had been dropped, and the candlelight showed the bold features, crisp hair, and keen eyes of a man of twenty-six. There were a few distinct lines in the face, put there by intimate knowledge of danger and the taking of long chances. It was saved from hardness by some element not easy to define.

"We'll drop the silver at Anderson's," he said aloud. "It'll buy groceries till Frank can get on his feet again. This'll give Beal's little girl a pair of glasses; and that'll lift Maitland's debt—— Gosh, I'm glad I got enough for that! Ho! I have five hundred left for myself this time. That's too dang much money." He rolled a smoke meditatively as he contemplated this embarrassment of wealth. "Maybe I'll buy me some white-faces and settle down and be good—— Great Holy Mathewson! Wouldn't that be a terrible life?" He listened a minute to the downpour outside. "If I could only find 'Cougar.'"

He made paper parcels of the different piles and stowed them about his person. A few he would deliver; the rest he would mail. The black box, and the mail sack, and every other scrap of evidence he took with him. All that would go over the edge of a gorge he knew.

It was toward morning, with the last of his errands done, that he paused for a moment to look back at a ranch house on a creek bank. A light had just appeared in the kitchen window. San knew that was Ella Wayburn starting breakfast for her father and brothers. San had worked three months for Wayburn last summer. He could have worked all year, but something had told him in time to leave. He knew that it had been in time, for the engagement of Ella and young Ted Handy had been announced lately.

The face of the young outlaw grew unconsciously wistful as he watched the light. It must be nice to have a house of your own to come to in the evening. This thing of calling home any place you hung your hat—not so good. It had been harder to break loose this year than it ever was before. Well, if he hadn't there wouldn't be half a dozen mystified but utterly happy families in this valley to-morrow.

San shook his shoulders and set his face to the great peaks of the Carlos, thinking, as he always did when doubt assailed him, of Cougar. Cougar was the only name by which San had ever known him—a tall, brown man who came and went as regally as a king and as unaccountably as the mist on the hills.

San had first seen him one night eight years ago in a saloon in Rico. That saloon had been packed with men, and talk, and the reek of whisky, and the racket of pool balls; and the uproar had suddenly shut off as if by a switch.

San, green, and lonely, and jobless, looked up to see a lithe, brown figure standing in the doorway, piercing eyes taking in the scene, not seeming to miss a single face.

"Cougar!"

The voice was only a breath at San's elbow, but the boy heard and—"Golly!" he said to himself. "He looks it. He walks like he's on springs."

The buckskin-clad newcomer was approaching the bar, stepping lightly as his namesake, ignoring the consternation he had caused. His single ebony-handled gun gleamed like a wicked black eye on his hip.

San learned afterward of Cougar's boundless contempt for two-gun men. When he met one, he would pause and look the gentleman over, up and down, without a flicker of expression in his face. Then he would walk slowly around his spellbound captive twice, and resume his way, not having uttered a syllable. No two-gun men, however hardy or fast or bad he might be, had

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the least desire to repeat that experience. Of course, he had either seen or heard of Cougar's astounding speed. Worst of all, there had been nothing in the ridiculous performance which gave the slightest excuse for retaliation.

San saw him several times after that and felt strongly drawn to him. Cougar must have been nine or ten years his senior, and the boy was caught in a natural hero-worship. The tale went that Cougar was a skillful and uniformly successful highwayman; that he never gambled nor drank to excess; that peace officers gave him a wide berth. They had not a scrap of evidence against him, whatever they suspected. He had no intimates. He came and went alone. He boarded a few weeks sometimes with poor ranchers who needed the money. San saw him one day stop a boy who was drinking too much, march him out to the stage which was just leaving town, thrust fifty dollars into his hand, and tell him to go home.

The incident made a tremendous impression on San. That's what it was to be a real Robin Hood. That beat all to heck working for forty dollars a month and feeling uselessly sorry for poor fellows out of luck. But it was something more personal which finally crystallized the boy's resolve.

San had been making a precarious living playing poker and pool. He was unusually proficient with a cue and had cleaned out three or four fellows of his own age who had rather fancied themselves sharks. They determined to get him by foul means since they could not by fair. There was a pot of a hundred dollars on a series of games one night. San had already won seven out of the ten to win, when some one joggled his elbow on a difficult shot. He straightened in anger, and turned to meet a ring of menacing faces. He saw that he was hopelessly outnumbered. He stepped back for his opponent to shoot.

On his next shot he saw to it that the space about him was clear, but this time some one jarred the table. However, his ball rolled into a pocket and with a smile he stooped to shoot again. As his stick connected with the cue ball a man coughed violently in his ear. He missed, leaving his opponent an excellent set-up.

San's teeth were clamped on his tongue. He could beat any of his enemies to the draw, but he was boy enough to hesitate at such an issue.

Again his elbow was joggled, but his cue had not touched the ball. He straightened with a hard smile, to see Cougar standing in the inner circle about the table. The outlaw had appeared without warning, and there was an immediate edging away from his vicinity. He stood looking at the last man who had jostled San, and that conspirator faded right out of the scene. Cougar then nodded to San.

"Shoot, boy!"

San finished the series under the eyes of his hero and accepted the pot. But when he turned to thank Cougar, the man was gone. It was that night that the boy decided his future. He would be a Robin Hood worthy the friendship and trust of such a man. When he had become proficient and successful, he would seek a partnership with Cougar. And if Cougar found him worthy, they would go adventuring together.

It was this dream which upheld him through the years that followed; through the cow camps and ranches where he would work for brief periods, learning the necessities of hard-pressed people; through the bold sorties he made upon trains and stages, and, on three different occasions, upon banks. It was a tremendous game to him, and he enjoyed every minute of it. Every minute, that is, but the ones when that queer dissatisfaction came upon him.

But he had lost all trace of Cougar. After a few years, rumor had it that

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the outlaw had gone North, and San gradually worked in that direction. He cherished a secret hope that Cougar would hear of him. He might even look him up, so serious had San's reputation become. Maybe he would hear of how San had lifted that ten thousand dollars in Mesa County which had been collected for a monument. The robber had distributed the money among the unemployed miners of the same county. San had decided convictions in this matter. The mines had closed down at Mesa Creek, leaving nearly two hundred men without jobs. And here the county was going to put all that money into a hunk of granite!

The outlaw's maneuver was productive of much furious chagrin and promises of horrible vengeance; but there was also a deal of subdued merriment. People were compelled to admit that the robber had displayed a nice sense of fitness, and he had left his grin-provoking signature on the blotter of the prominent citizen whose safe had held the money.

The clerk of the district court and a county commissioner stood on the courthouse steps in Vallejo and watched four men mount horses and ride westward out of town.

"Custer County," said the commissioner, "drew a prize when they elected Bruce sheriff."

"Kind of a standoffish fellow," the clerk commented. "Never seems to have much to say. Where'd he come from?"

"I don't know. Enough for us that he's cleaned this county of thieves and gunmen. They say that Hatfield and Mesa, too, on both sides of us, are peaceful as a Young Men's Christian Association meeting. The outlaws aren't sure just how long his arm is."

"Ever ask him about that white scar on his temple?"

"Huh! Did you ever ask a grizzly to let you count its teeth?"

"Um—— Think he'll get this S, that's dodged every marshal and sheriff for—how many years is it?"

"He'll get him," stated the commissioner positively, "or his deputies'll carry him home."

Sheriff Bruce, ten miles out of the county seat, swung his little posse sharply north.

"But," protested one deputy, "didn't that rancher say he saw those men heading for the border?"

Bruce nodded. "I don't think those are the men we're looking for."

"But they're the only ones that've been seen, aren't they?"

"Yeah."

"Well—well——" The deputy's words stumbled and he glanced toward his fellows, who grinned uncomfortingly at him. They had been out with the sheriff before and knew that their chief possessed an almost uncanny insight into the mind of a fugitive. Bruce had, in fact, privately concluded that S was much too intelligent to do so obvious a thing as make for the border.

All that day they rode hard, mounting at dusk the foothills of the Carlos Mountains, pressing on till nine o'clock under a full and brilliant moon. Then they camped, the three deputies bedding down close to a tumbling creek, but the sheriff taking his blankets to high ground where the noise of the water was not so loud.

He did not sleep for some time. He was dozing off near midnight when a moonbeam shot through the trees and seemed to hit him squarely in the face. He came full awake, but kept his eyes closed and listened intently. He knew that it was not the moonlight on his lids which had wakened him. It had been some vibration against his eardrums.

But for all his watchfulness and all his keen hearing, he was not in the least prepared for a whisper within a yard of his head.

"Cougar!"

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For ten seconds Sheriff Bruce lay nerveless, his blood flowing cold in his veins. Then he gathered himself. Here, if ever, was a time when the years of rigid self-discipline must count. His lips formed a "Yes," though otherwise he made no movement.

"Follow me," said the whisper. "I'm your friend."

The sheriff did not hear his visitor move, but he turned his head and saw him glide like a shadow up the slope. Somewhere that man had had Indian training. Bruce listened a moment to the snores below him, then followed.

The figure ahead moved swiftly up through the trees, the moonlight dappling him with glancing mystery, and emerged in a grassy hollow against a ledge of rock. There San turned to face the sheriff, and even in the moonlight the officer saw the vivid glow of happiness in the young face.

"I thought you always worked alone, Cougar. I'm pretty darned leery of partners myself."

The completely puzzled sheriff had to play for time. Had he ever seen this man before?

"How did you spot me?" he asked.

"I've kept up with you all day," explained San, "on the ridge above. At first, I thought you were a sheriff's posse. Then I saw that you weren't hunting a trail but beating it straight into the mountains. After a while, I began watching you; and it came over me like a shot that only one man ever sat a horse like that. Maybe you think I wasn't tickled! Nearly eight years since you dropped out of sight at Rico, and I was about ready to give up."

"Rico," thought the sheriff. That narrowed it down, but what——

"You don't remember me," said San. "Course you wouldn't. Remember the time you made them give me an even break in that pool game? Nobody ever needed a hundred dollars worse than I did that, and I sure owed it to you."

"You—why, are you that kid?"

"Sure!" San laughed. "And I made up my mind that night that I was going to be as near—well"—he was embarrassed, but he must get it out—"as near like you as I could. And—and"—he ended lamely—"here I am."

Bruce passed a cold hand over a hot forehead and inquired steadily:

"You—you mean you——"

San nodded, almost overcome with sudden shyness.

"Course I can't hold a candle to you, but—but maybe you've heard of a guy who signs himself 'S'?"

The sheriff stood so strangely still that Sam became a little uneasy. He couldn't tell why. Maybe he'd been presumptuous. All his boyish love for this man had come back sevenfold. What a magnificent creature Cougar was, standing there so quiet in the moonlight! San did not dream what the other was seeing in the face before him, or how the sheriff's body was running with sudden perspiration under his clothes as he looked upon the seed that he had sown.

"Let's be sure we have this straight." Bruce's controlled voice sent a sharp chill along San's spine. If Cougar didn't want him, after all! "You are the man who held up No. 5 last week?"

San nodded, watching the other anxiously.

"And it was you who took that money and distributed it among the miners in Mesa County?"

In spite of his tragic predicament, the sheriff's mouth had to twitch with the memory. San nodded happily at that first sign of relaxation.

"Weren't they a sore bunch? The president of the First National was the maddest, so I knocked over his bank the next summer and—well, he didn't foreclose some mortgages he'd been counting on."

Bruce stared at him. "And that was

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you? You didn't sign yourself that time."

"Oh, yes, I did! Put it under the inkstand. The buzzard didn't dare tell or they'd have laughed him out of the country."

For a time the sheriff stood silent. San hoped he was considering the question of a partnership. Bruce was all at sea, without a single notion of how to end this terrible farce. Presently he asked:

"Where are your men?"

"My—what?"

"That Chet and Red and Matt they say always work with you."

San's smile began in his eyes, tugged at his lips, and spread slowly all over his face. Bruce was much too keen to miss its meaning.

"Are you telling me that you've worked alone all the time?"

Again the young man's nod and a chuckle.

"But the passengers heard men answer you."

"Well, Cougar, you've seen conjurers. People believe what you expect them to believe."

After another silence Bruce confessed. "Well, you've certainly got me stopped."

"Aw," disclaimed San, misreading the words, "it's nothing to the things they used to tell about you. But if you think I'm worth—well, kind of throwing in with——"

The hope, the unconscious loneliness in the tone were too much for Bruce. He lifted a face that even in the moonlight looked white. It stopped San like a hand across his mouth. For a moment the eyes of the two met steadily. Then Bruce slowly turned back the flap of his vest.

San came a step closer to make out what the other was showing him. For a space he stared with widening eyes, then looked up, moveless.

Neither knew just how long they stood so. From that first sharp shock, San came back to the pain in the eyes of Cougar.

"It was about the time," the sheriff finally said, "that you decided to enter upon a career of crime that I decided to abandon it. I never did half the good you've done; and I came to the conclusion that lawbreaking hurt the breaker a lot more than it did any one else. Of course, I never guessed——" He made a helpless gesture. "All I can do is tell you to go—and for Heaven's sake, cut it out!"

San was thinking hard. The jolt of revelation had left him without an idea for a minute. But his danger-infested years had taught him to meet surprises coolly. Feeling, which had always predominated with him, was still master. Cougar's situation, he realized, was much worse than his own. San thrilled to know that this man was not one inch less a hero than he had thought him. Cougar had told him to go. That meant public acknowledgment of failure, a confession of inadequacy, of inability to capture the most notorious robber in the whole Southwest.

How easily might Cougar have taken him, using his faith and devotion as means, until escape would have been impossible. San could have flung his arms about the other, so full was his heart. But that would never do—and all at once he saw the way out—the one way in the world to save both of them. Every nerve in him revolted against taking it. The thought of it made him physically sick for a second. But it was the only way. He must be a good actor, a dang good actor. He nearly choked on his first words.

"So that's what you turned into? And I thought it was a man!" The pain of the shabby thing he was doing made his voice sound savage. "Why, you danged sucking calf, you! And to think I was such a fool!"

Bruce made a weary movement. "I

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see how it looks to you. I don't blame you. But go. Go quickly, boy!"

"Go! D'you think I'm afraid of you or any one of your two-for-a-cent deputies?"

"I know you're not afraid. Can't you see my position?"

San thought desperately. "If he keeps that up, I'll break down like a kid. I've got to make him mad." And aloud, with fierce sarcasm: "Think you can beat me to the draw, don't you?" His hand went to his hip on the word.

His gun was not half out when the sheriff was holding something toward him. The moonlight glittered on the ebony handle, for the muzzle was in Cougar's fist.

That nearly finished San; but he caught himself, cursed, seized the proffered weapon and flung it aside. He jerked out his own gun, dropped it, stepped close to the other, and, not letting himself think, struck.

The sheriff's cheek flooded with color under the blow, and for one flash his eyes were dangerous. Then they grew quiet. He had not moved.

Desperately, San struck again, harder, this time using fighting words, boring in with the fury of despair.

Bruce could take no more. He would have to thrash the young cub into some semblance of reason. San found himself in a whirlwind of fists and elbows, and for minutes he was forced to put his whole strength into defense. Bruce delivered an uppercut that sent him reeling, and stepped back.

"Now will you listen, you fire-eating young——"

San saw his advantage. He leaped upon the sheriff and bore him down, got on top, tried to turn him on his back. The fight was on in earnest this time, with now one above, now the other. They struggled to their knees, went down again, got to their feet, and fell with a force that jarred every bone. They rolled over, and over, and over, landing few telling blows, but bruising each other considerably. San was thinking:

"I can't knock him out. I can't! I want him to know. And I've got to lick him!"

For an agonizing interval the boy was afraid he could not do it. But youth was on his side. Bruce, fighting just as hard as ever, was having trouble breathing. San got above. The sheriff rolled on his face to get up. With a lightning twist, San jerked one of his arms through his gun belt and pinned his hand with a knee. Legs clamped hard below Cougar's ribs, San grasped the other arm and drew it back.

Face in the trampled ground, the breath squeezed out of him, one arm pulling up in the terrible hammer-lock, Bruce suddenly found himself helpless. Things began to go black; held as he was, he literally could not breathe.

San realized this and worked with the utmost speed, knotting Bruce's hands together with his silk handkerchief before he flopped him over. Carefully he brushed away the dirt, and with intense relief saw Cougar take in the air with painful gulps. The sheriff was not able to protest at the removal of his trousers belt, with which San fastened his feet together. But there was something tigerish in the eyes that looked up from the ground, and he muttered through swollen lips:

"I'll get you yet!"

"You've got me, white man." San knelt and put a hand on the laboring chest. "Cougar, some day you can beat me to a pulp for this. But I had to do it. You see, I had to, don't you? I—I never had a brother. You're kinda like that to me, and—oh, a lot more! I couldn't have you going back there—well, the way they'd talk. You know. Make up a good yarn before your men find you. Well, I'll be going now. And I'm getting out, Cougar. There's a war on the other side of the world. I guess

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a man can get in. And if I ever come back——"

The sheriff's eyes were steady. He said thickly:

"I told you to go, dang you!"

San looked at him a second, essayed a grin with his wrecked mouth, pressed down a moment on the broad chest, and was gone.

Two weeks later a tall, taciturn man stood on the rear platform of the eastbound train out of Vallejo and waved a fond good-by to most of the county seat.

"I suppose," said the clerk of the district court, "that he resigned because that bunch of outlaws beat him up and then got away, after all."

"You can't never tell about him," replied the county commissioner. "But you can tell about one thing sure: Custer County'll never have another sheriff like him."

The man on the rear platform of the train watched Vallejo fade from view, then turned his eyes north to the dim line of the Carlos Peaks

"I don't know," he told himself, "how one goes about finding a person. But that green spot on the map doesn't look very dang big anyway—buddy."

THE RICHES OF OREGON

ACCORDING to the findings of the geological survey, the vast natural resources of Oregon include potentially ten per cent of the nation's water power. The indefatigable industry of the survey in making its report is shown by the fact that no less than eight manuscript reports on the subject of Oregon's water-power resources alone were prepared and are open to public inspection.

This and much other information of the same character was obtained by the survey in its studies of the public lands of the State with a view to their classification according to their highest use or value. In developing most of the water power referred to, public lands would be affected and six hundred and forty-five thousand acres of public land have been listed as valuable for power sites. There are in Oregon eighteen thousand and nine hundred acres of coal lands; more than twenty million acres of land have been classified as arid and non-irrigable; more than six million acres have been classified as valuble chiefly for grazing; and tracts amounting to twenty-one thousand and three hundred acres have been withdrawn and are reserved as stock-watering places.

As far as funds permit, the information acquired by the geological survey is available to the public, part of it by publication and part by opening manuscript reports to public inspection. The manuscript reports may be consulted at a district office maintained in the Post Office Building, Portland, Oregon.

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Tiger's Den

By John Frederick

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

JOE WARDER is sent across the border to capture El Tigre. His chance traveling companion is young Dennis MacMore, in search of his brother Patrick—The MacMore. At San Clemente, they seek Patrick at the house of José Guadalupe, and are sent secretly by the lovely Alicia to the house of Señor Cantaras. Denny is admitted. Warder stealthily follows and assists at a conference between Alicia, Cantaras, and Gualtero, a giant servant. Alicia is harshly rebuked for betraying the secret. All speak reverently of "the Señor." He appears and is—Patrick MacMore. He denies knowledge of Dennis, orders him shipped to New Orleans; forgives and dismisses Alicia; and orders the hidden Warder killed. All leave. Warder reveals himself and demands that MacMore return with him over the border. As a counter-proposal, MacMore coolly suggests that Warder join him in his business—of mining!

CHAPTER XV.

GUNS IN HAND.

MY first idea was that he was a liar out and out; the second was that perhaps he told the truth, since there was no good reason why a confederate and ally of the terrible El Tigre might not actually be the owner of a mine. Perhaps that was the reason at the back of the strange alliance—the white man's brains to furnish ideas to the bandit, and the bandit's long arm to protect the mine. I admitted that as a possibility, but still I was by no means sure. Whatever else he was, I could be sure that MacMore was a finished liar.

I probed him a little farther on the other side.

"But you think I could get an opening down here?"

"I know it."

"Because you're a friend of El Tigre?"

"That's it."

"I'm on the other side of the law," I told him finally, now that he had shown a part of his hand.

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"I thought you were," he replied, "but sometimes a pillar of the church in Boston is a savage in Tucson. At any rate, I want to make some sort of a business deal with you."

"To save yourself?"

"Naturally. Let me see what it can be."

He raised his head and lowered his eyes, in the process of his thought.

"MacMore," I said suddenly, "why won't you let the boy see you?"

"What boy?" he asked, then added: "Ah, you mean Dennis?"

"I mean Denny," I said.

"Because he's young and the country is dangerous," said MacMore. "I walk here on the edge of a sword, myself. Do you imagine that I want Denny in this sort of a layout?"

"You can protect yourself, though," I returned.

"I play a double game," said MacMore, with the greatest appearance of frankness. "On the one hand, I am the friend and adviser of El Tigre, which is something like being a tiger tamer. One never knows when the big jaws will close on one's head! In the second place, I'm the miner. Now, then, I get on well enough with El Tigre, and he's willing to give me protection from the Indians and the Mexicans. However, that protection is full of flaws. I don't even dare to let the location of my mine be known to every one. I have to keep it a half secret. I can protect myself, but I don't want the risk of protecting my brother, also. You've had a chance to see what sort of a headstrong youngster he is. He could easily pull both of us into the mire."

I stood back a little farther and studied the ingenuous face of Patrick MacMore. After all, it was exactly this sort of business that he would be apt to enjoy—playing one power off against another and gaining out of it a certain authority and also a certain amount of money. I began to lose some of my animosity and a great deal of my fear with it. You can't dread a man you commence to like.

"He has come a long distance," said I. "He rode through all sorts of trouble, as I happen to know. And if you send him away this time to New Orleans, you don't need to think that he'll stay away. He'll come back, and the next time, he'll either find you or die trying."

MacMore made a little gesture.

"No matter what you think, that lad is not a complete fool," he told me. "This lesson will be learned so thoroughly that he won't repeat it. He'll find a long letter from me when he gets back. That letter will tell him not to come to San Clemente again, and I think that he'll obey. Don't you?"

"I think that he might, if no one told him the truth about you and El Tigre and the sort of life you lead down here."

"Meaning that you may tell him?"

"If I get out of this country alive."

"Exactly," said MacMore.

He smiled at me, and the smile was a thing worth seeing and remembering. I thought of a cat licking its whiskers!

So I nodded at MacMore in turn. "We're dealing clearly with each other," I said. "You want my scalp."

"Not a bit. But my poor friend El Tigre does."

"And you pity him enough to help?"

"Naturally. He can't help being a brute. He was made that way, in the beginning. But he has virtues, too."

"Such as courage, et cetera?" I suggested.

"Exactly. And faith in his friends, unless he takes too much tequila on the way." He made a little pause and then added: "If I were you, Warder, I'd chuck this business. You're up against more than you possibly can handle."

It makes any man see red when he's told that he's up against the impossible, and like any one else, I couldn't help getting angry when I heard him talk.

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At last I said: "Look here, MacMore, I've been given a job, and my business is not to argue about possibles or impossibles. I have to stick to the trail until I get him, or until he gets me."

MacMore smiled again, and I never saw a smile that I liked less.

"You amuse me, amigo," said he. "Here you are, a man of brains, courage, and virtue, plus a good deal of education. Where did you pick that up, by the way?"

"In prison," I answered.

"Ah, prison?" said he.

"Yes. I've spent enough of my life there. That's where I picked up a little bookishness."

"As good a way as any, I suppose. But all of your good qualities are tempered, stained I might say, by excessive virtue. I offer you a chance to play with El Tigre, but you won't be contented with anything other than a knife in your throat. Well, you are the chooser! I cannot help that."

"You can't help seeing, however," said I, "that before anything happens to me, a bullet will happen to you!"

"That may be true, but I'm only one hand of El Tigre. A right hand, if you will, but he has many others. People who would die for him, largely because he is apt to punish failure with something worse than death."

"You mean to say that you're a servant to El Tigre?"

"In a large sense, yes, that's true."

"I don't believe it," said I.

"Oh, you don't believe it?"

"I don't believe that you're a servant to any man in the world," said I, and looking him firmly in the eye, I was more and more convinced that what I said was true.

"Well," said MacMore, "of course, one might say that I'm a sort of junior partner in the firm. That's a pleasanter way of putting it; if you don't like the idea of a white man being the servant of an Indian."

"I've told you the truth," said I. "I'll tell you one more."

"I hope so."

"You're going to get up from that chair and come with me."

"Out of the house?"

"Exactly. Out of the house."

"My friend, you'll find twenty people to pick you off on the way."

"Not if you tell them to hold off."

"Shall I tell them that?"

"Yes, while you have a revolver pressed against the small of your back."

"A very cruel idea, Warder."

"I'm talking to a cruel man, MacMore," I answered. "You'll have to stand up."

"Very well," said he. "In that case I'll have to use my last argument."

"If you attempt any move, I'll shoot you where you sit."

"I know you will, Warder," he answered. "I know all about you, in fact, because we had to find out as soon as we learned that you were on this trail."

"How did you find that out?"

"There are leaks in any sieve."

"I suppose so."

I ran my mind's eye over the men of the marshal's office. It was quite true that half of them were capable of any kind of rascality, though I knew that the other half were pure steel.

"But knowing all about you," he went on, "of course we're afraid of you. You must have heard me giving the order that you're to die before the morning?"

"I heard that."

"It will be carried out."

"Perhaps."

"Without fail, whether I live or die. You've had the period put to your useful career, my friend. All of your robberies, gun fights, and then arrests on behalf of the law are at an end, no matter whether I leave this room with you alive or not."

"I hear you say that; in the meantime, suppose we start along."

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"Willingly, but I haven't stated my last argument to you."

"Come, then. I'm listening."

"This is the fact of the matter. You are a good hand with a gun, Warder. A great hand, some say; but you and I know better. You are no El Tigre, though a very sufficiently skillful practitioner. However, there is one circumstance under which your skill will be useless."

"I don't know what that circumstance can be," I retorted.

He had reached out a hand in the midst of his argument, looking at me fixedly in the eye, as a man does when a great idea is about to be brought forth by him.

"Darkness!" he shouted suddenly at me.

And with a side move of his hand, he dashed the lamp to pieces and filled the room with darkness.

I fired as the lamp went out. I fired by the last flash of it, as I saw him fling sidewise from his chair. I fired knowing that the noise of the shot would probably bring a rushing crowd which would dash me to pieces.

But, somehow, it seemed to me far better to shoot and take this clever rascal with me than to allow him to get off unharmed.

Yet, even as I pulled the trigger, I knew that I had failed. I shot again as I heard him strike the floor, and there was an answering crash of a gun, and the whir of a bullet breathlessly close to my face.

The battle was on.

CHAPTER XVI.

OUT OF ONE FIRE.

WHEN I faced that man in full light, having him at an advantage, I have said that I felt like one caged with a beast. And now I was with him in the same room, with no advantage, and lost in the darkness! Besides, footfalls began to hurry down the hallway, but they were nothing to frighten me; I was almost glad of whatever might happen, so long as it took me away from the power of this superman. If this seems a strange reaction, then I can only say that I have not been able to convey the right impression of him in what I already have spoken about MacMore.

I know that I crouched down against the floor and glared about me into the blackness, with eyes starting from my head, moving a little from side to side as I strove to get a sight of MacMore against the faint moonlight that showed outside the window and always backing toward the door.

Up to that door, in the meantime, the footfalls and the voices came rushing, paused, and burst it open. All at once I saw several faces, and above all others, the towering, huge shoulders of Gualtero.

A terror behind me and a terror before, as you might say!

I heard MacMore shouting in a terrible voice for them to look out, because I certainly would try to break through them; but before he had the words well out, I plunged at the legs of the men, driving myself forward with all the speed and the strength in my body.

A man will remember things with a wonderful vividness at such times. I have heard people say that they had seen the whole course of their lives when in danger of death, but of course, I am not a tender or imaginative soul. At any rate, all that I have seen was the face of the danger, and that with a wonderful clearness. For instance, if I were a painter, I could show you every detail of the faces and the men who now stood before me, and above all the bare knees of a long-legged *mozo* at which I threw myself.

I thought I had broken both his legs when I struck them with my shoulders, they gave so before me, and he went down with such a dreadful screech.

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I tumbled on top of him, but without losing much motion.

So I pitched to my feet again, with half a dozen hands reaching after me. Why didn't they shoot? Perhaps because the game seemed so entirely in their hands. You don't waste powder and shot on the wild bird when you have it in the room with you. At any rate, I did not keep a straight course ahead of them. I remembered the long legs of Gualtero and knew that I could not outrun him, whatever I could do with the rest. On the left hand I saw an open door, and I rushed through that in time to jerk it shut in the faces of those yelling man hunters.

One sweet moment of hope was that when I heard them shouting away with the thickness of that strong door behind me. Heaven bless the carpenter who framed that door, the locksmith who made the lock, the strong-hearted tree which furnished the wood! I heard them fling their shoulders against that barrier, and with their bullets they crushed out the lock itself, but in the meantime I had a second of respite.

Of course, I was at the window. It looked down into the courtyard, and there I saw five or six horses, all with empty saddles, except one, where a man sat with his hands ironed together behind his back.

When he looked up at that instant, I recognized young Denny MacMore, and he, it seemed, recognized me as I hung out from the window into the cold light of the moon, for he shouted hoarsely.

It was a friend's face, and it gave me heart, no matter whether the hands were ironed or free. I shot myself through the window. There was below me the narrow ledge of the eaves that projected above the window of the ground floor. If I missed that, I would carom onto the cobbles of the patio pavement, and that would mean a broken head or a snapped leg bone, at the least. However, there was only that chance.

Inside the house, already I heard the thunder of heavy feet on the stairs as they rushed to cut off my escape in exactly this manner, though others remained above, battering in the door. So I loosed my hold. My feet struck the ledge, fair and true; but the sagging of my knees forced them against the wall, and this shock slipped me off the ledge as quickly as I landed at it. However, the force of my fall was decidedly broken, so that I landed in the courtyard of the house on both feet again, well shaken, but without a broken bone or even so much as a bad bruise, except where my knees had struck against the wall of the house.

I could have stood worse pain than that, however, at that moment, for the hope which I had felt as I got a door between me and my enemies was a thousand times stronger now that I was under the open sky. I shouted, without knowing at the moment that I did so.

I remember that within the house the voice of some one running rapidly toward the patio shouted with an enormous strength something about the gate, and a *mozo* scurried toward it, leaping out from the shadow.

But by this time I was in the nearest saddle. I scooped up the reins of MacMore's horse while, as only he could have done, he shouted at me to go on and save myself and not worry about him.

The brute of a horse pulled back—for how long? Oh, half a second, perhaps. But half a second is enough when a bullet, say, is tearing its way through your body, and no bullet could have given me more exquisite pain than the fear of Gualtero and the older Macmore running out toward me from the house.

The pull on the reins and the thumping of Denny's heels at last got the stupid horse in action. He trotted, then lunged into a gallop with a suddenness

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that almost jerked MacMore from the saddle.

Before us, the *mozo* was leaning back with all his weight, forcing one panel of the patio gate shut, but we went through the other with a rush and turned our horses in the open street, poor Denny reeling in the saddle and almost going out of it as we straightened away.

We turned the next corner, and I sent the horses headlong into the trees. Then I pulled rein.

For one thing, I wanted to get Larry; for another, that street was scoured clean of people, and I was fairly sure that our exact course had not been marked. The pursuit might run on past us in this hiding place which they would hardly think we would resort to. Frightened men with horses under them are more apt to trust to the spur, and I hoped that the pursuit would count on this.

Well, it turned out that I was right I heard a vicious roaring of many hoofs that turned the corner and then bolted past the trees, with some one shouting commands in ringing Spanish. I shuddered a little as I listened, for I recognized that voice!

Here we were, then, with three horses, but MacMore's hands ironed behind his back, while we listened to the pouring hoofbeats turn distant corners and then suddenly diminish to nothing, so that we could hear the sound of the music in the Plaza Municipal soaring softly and sweetly in the distance. It brought violently into my mind that all of these things had happened in a single evening, and that we had twice come out of the teeth of death in almost exactly the same manner. From that day to this a quiet little patio has never seemed a place of peace to me, but rather like a lion's mouth.

Young MacMore offered no suggestion, did not speak a word, in fact, of thanks or of praise, but simply waited at my disposal while I stared at the moonlight that filtered through the trees and wondered what I could do next. But at last I climbed into the saddle on Larry and guided the horses straight through the little wood, and out onto the street on the farther side, leaving behind the animal which I had ridden from the house of Cantaras.

I was cursing to myself, because my bruised knees had begun to ache terribly; and that faint muttering of my own voice raised my heart a good deal. As a matter of fact, I had no idea what we should attempt to try next. All I knew was that we were free for the instant, and all I saw before me was inescapable danger. Before long, every street of San Clemente would be filled with busy man hunters, if I guessed rightly at the power of MacMore, or of his barbarous chief, El Tigre.

In the meantime, it was better to go slowly and attract little attention. So we kept the horses not even at a trot, but walked them down the dusty street.

Children were playing in it! It was as strange to me as anything I've ever looked at to see them at their games in the soft dust, tumbling, wrestling, racing, when there had been such happenings a single square away from them. The light from windows and doors, also, touched on us like quiet, unseeing eyes, and let us go by unchallenged. In the middle of the next square I heard the rapid chinking of a hammer upon an anvil, and turned at once toward it.

Young MacMore guessed my intention and for the first time tried to oppose me since we had started from the house of Cantaras, for he cried out softly to me: "There's no good in this, Joe. Every minute that you lose now is giving them a chance to guard the roads out of San Clemente. No matter about my hands. No matter at all. Let's get out of this."

The answer I gave him was a shock to me. Perhaps you have done the same

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thing yourself, mulling a matter over in your mind and yet hardly knowing what the effect of your thought was until suddenly your own voice put it into words.

"We're not leaving San Clemente," I told him. "We're staying right here inside the town."

I heard MacMore gasp. There was about as little fear in him as in any man I ever knew or heard of. But this decision was a shock to him, and no wonder. It was a shock to me, also, as I spoke.

But what else was there for us to do, except to adopt the strong policy and face the danger?

I was at least inside the walls of the enemy, at this time. Once outside of them again, I never would have a chance to get at the mystery of El Tigre. I had seen Denny's brother face to face—and luckily brought my life away from that encounter. And although I had bought these two gains at the expense of a great deal of danger, still they were something in pocket. And no matter how thoroughly El Tigre searched the town where he seemed to have such power, at least there was some chance that we could hide here for a while longer. It was no small village every nook of which could be combed. We might lurk in a corner.

That single gasp was all the protest that the boy made. He remained silent as before, while we headed down a little alley and so came to the hammering which we had heard in the distance. A greyhound stood up at the open door and snarled at us; and by the light of a pair of smoky lanterns we looked in through air streaked with curls of smoke and saw inside the blacksmith at his forge fire, where he was working the bellows with one hand, the other resting on his hip. He was as grim a looking man as I ever laid eyes on, but I was resolved to use him for our purpose, so I dismounted at once.

CHAPTER XVII

INTO ANOTHER.

ALL makers with brain and hand should be cheerful people, because there is nothing so contenting in the world as to make beautiful or useful things out of plain wood and from solid iron. But above every one, I think, the blacksmith is the good-natured man. His work keeps him in muscle, which gives him a sense of important superiority to his fellow men. Usually, he is a fellow of some tonnage, too, to balance the weight of a twelve or fourteen-pound sledge. He is the perfect combination of brawn and brains, and such a thing as a stupid blacksmith, I dare say, never was seen on the face of the earth. By that, I don't mean the people who work in big factories, going through a few mechanical maneuvers which machines will eventually replace, but I mean the man who stands by with raw iron and ventures to make to order with hand and fire. Having such powers, and yet without a craft which can lead them to wealth, no wonder that they are found to be contented people as a general rule.

But one glance at this man in San Clemente was enough to tell me that he was of a different nature. He was a lean, time-dried man of more than fifty, who looked overmatched by the ponderous sledges that leaned against the wall, so meager were his arms, though they were strung with narrow sinews of muscle. He had a leather apron around him for protection against the stinging showers of sparks, but there was no shirt beneath the apron, so that I could see his ribs and count them one by one. The cords of his neck stood out like fingers, and his chest still was heaving from his last bout at the anvil. To crown his appearance he had a lean face with a hawk nose, and a smudge of soot over one eye gave him an expression of sinister whimsicality. His glance, al-

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most as a matter of course, was thoughtfully resting on the ground.

I remained in the shadows by the door while I tested him with words, in spite of his gloomy appearance. You can't tell even a mustang by the mere look of him.

"Señor," said I, "you are a good example to us all."

He merely raised his eyes from the floor and looked at me with a glance which, I knew, pierced the shadows and read every line of my face. I was sunburned till my skin was even darker than his, but I saw his brows lift a trifle and knew that he was saying to himself: "Gringo."

A bad start for me!

"Because," I explained myself clumsily, "you show us how to make the working day longer."

He worked the bellows automatically while he answered in a voice much pleasanter than I had expected:

"You know, I am only a poor slave, señor."

"I would lay a bet," I answered, "that you are no slave. You own the whole shop you work in, I should say."

"And, therefore," he answered, "I have to pay taxes on it. I have a house, also, and that is worth taxing as well. So that I am twice as much a slave as if I were hired."

"Then the richer the man the more he is a slave?" I suggested, managing a smile.

"Slaves are well treated," he replied. "Suppose I am a *hacendado,* I treat my peons well because a fat peon makes a good worker, and a sick one is something out of my pocket. That's a simple thing to see."

"Then why not sell your shop and your house and go to work for another man?"

"Because I am proud," said he. "Pride is the whipstock and the lash, and the hand that swings it. I worked for forty years to get a house and a shop, and after getting them, how can I give them up?"

"You talk like a tired man," I told him. "After all, a few taxes are for the good of the country and don't make you a slave."

"I am a slave, nevertheless," said he. "Why am I here to-night?"

"For the sake of money," I suggested.

"For the sake of the Donna Alvarado," he answered, and sneered at the thought.

"Well," said I, "she will appreciate the quick work."

"She will appreciate nothing," said he. "I never work to win good praise, but to keep away bad talk. You are never praised unless you have been a fool and gulled out of any good measure. She will pay for the work, look three times at the andirons, wish that she had bought old ones, and then forget the andirons, and me, and everything except the price that she paid for them. However, sparrows should not cheep when the hawk is in the air."

"That," said I, "I cannot follow."

"Do you think there is no hawk in the air, hanging above San Clemente?" he asked. He sneered again, and added: "Or I might say, something that prowls and hunts?"

I was surprised to hear him. It seemed clear enough that he was referring to El Tigre, and that was a thing which I had understood no man in San Clemente dared to do.

"Señor," said I, "you are a brave man."

"For what reason?" he asked.

"Because you, at least, say what you please."

"I pick out a safe listener, however," answered the blacksmith. "It can never be said that Enrico Orthez speaks to the dumb or pats the neck of a tiger!"

Now that he had become as open as this, I felt encouraged to take a step into the shop. He turned a little from me to gather the coals above the flame

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of his forge; a puff of thick, heavy smoke instantly jetted out from the sides of the new fuel. It rose in a cloud and enveloped Enrico Orthez in the fumes.

"How do you know that I am a safe man to talk to?" said I.

"Well," said he, "a man who is under the paw of the tiger is not likely to tell him that a mouse is nibbling at his hind foot."

"Am I under the paw of El Tigre?" I asked, stepping instantly into the full sense of his talk.

It was enough to chill any one, the calmness with which this man told me such a thing.

"Ah," said the blacksmith, "perhaps you have been climbing walls and shooting guns for pleasure, and nearly breaking your legs as you jumped? Perhaps that was not because of El Tigre?"

"Why do you say these things?" I asked him, curious.

"You have nearly rubbed through the cloth over your knees; the skin of your finger tips is rubbed to the raw, and there is a streak of red on the butt of your revolver," said he.

"I stumbled in the street," I answered, beginning to feel that this blacksmith was an evil bird in more than his lean looks, "and I fell on my hands and knees. The red on the gun butt came from a touch of my hand."

Enrico Orthez yawned. "And when you stood up," said he, "you found that your friend was in handcuffs. Is that the story?"

It made my head spin, and I must have showed my astonishment in my face, for Enrico permitted himself the faintest of smiles.

"So you have come to the poor blacksmith to ask him to put his own life in danger by cutting off the irons which the señor has put on your wrists? Tell me, my friend, if you think that I am only a blacksmith, or also a fool?"

"I think," said I from my heart, "that you can look through walls, see in the dark, read men's minds, and foresee the future. How in the name of fortune do you happen to know all these things?"

"There is a certain cat," he replied, "that purs in San Clemente, and whenever it purs the entire town listens. When it sharpens its claws, the people grin with fear. Now, the whisper came through San Clemente that two strangers were coming to our town, and that the noble Señor wished to see them. I see these two on the very night when I already have heard the sound of guns a few squares away. I see two strangers who come to my shop and speak good Mexican with strange faces. I listen to them, and in spite of myself, I cannot help hearing chains on the hands of one of them, though he has kept a distance away."

He ended his explanation with a wave of the hand, his arm looking skeleton thin as he extended it.

"You see that everything is plain and easily understood," said he, "There is no mystery about a poor blacksmith."

I laughed aloud. He had looked through and through me and my poor little affairs, and so easily that I almost forgot to be afraid. If he could see through me so easily, I was hardly the man to be considered worth hunting to death by the terrible Señor. And yet I could not help remembering that the Señor with his own lips had pronounced me dangerous enough to be worth killing at once!

Now the blacksmith, in my estimation, grew greater and greater. He seemed like a seer, or a wizard.

But young MacMore stepped readily into the light of the lanterns, and turning his back to the anvil, he held out his locked hands.

"You know everything about us," he said, "but perhaps you don't know that we are honest men. Look, Joe. We are in his hands. If he so much as whistles, we're done for. Señor, will

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you make me a free man—for five minutes before I die?"

I was surprised to hear the little dramatic flourish in the voice of Denny, but it had its effect upon the sardonic Orthez.

He nodded and grunted. Then he said: "I have seen handcuffs once or twice before, in my life. Let me see those!"

He leaned over them for a moment, grunting again with satisfaction. Then, with a short piece of watch spring, or something that looked like it, he worked for a moment at the lock, and was rewarded almost at once by a distinct click. The cuffs opened, and young MacMore's hands were once more free!

He had turned to thank the blacksmith when we heard the horses in the street. I whirled to get at Larry, when Orthez broke in with his usual calm:

"There is nothing to do by running. This is a blind canyon that you have ridden into. The street is closed, and you cannot get through, my friends!"

Actually, he stood there leaning one hand on the handle of the bellows and looking as though he were greedily devouring our fear.

Then he grunted, as the noise of the many riders grew: "Let them stand where they are, and come back through my shop."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE GARDEN.

FOR an instant I hesitated, staring at Denny to see if he shared my suspicion that the blacksmith might be playing us false; but Denny seemed incapable of thought. He merely stared back at me with strange, wide eyes, as though he saw no way out of this danger, but was willing to trust in me blindly. It may make some men proud to be so trusted, but it did not have that effect on me. I prefer to do my work alone and have no skin but my own to answer for in the end. I had to make a decision by myself, and make it in half a second. What I decided was that there were two chances out of five that the blacksmith would be honest, and those two chances were worth taking.

I nodded to him, and Orthez motioned us through the back door of the shop, set in close to the forge itself. Passing through this, we found ourselves in a small garden sweet with orange blossoms and fenced in by a well except where the blacksmith shop itself was standing, and where a house appeared just opposite it. I could guess that that was the house of our friend Orthez.

What was clearer than anything else was that we were neatly trapped here. The wall was high, and with one gesture, the blacksmith could send the hunters in to catch us. Everything now depended upon Orthez himself. So when I found a chink of light that pierced through the wall of the smithy, I put my eye to it. I was lucky to find such a spy hole, because the wall of the shop was made of thick adobe, but here one of the bricks had crumbled in part. There was a mere chink on the outside, but this opened like a funnel within and allowed me to take a view of the greater part of the shop.

I was kneeling, with MacMore close beside me, and even the fear of El Tigre's men and the Señor was not enough to keep another fear out of my mind. For the soil of Mexico is fertile in something more than plants and trees, and through my brain went all the stories I had heard of the vipers, striped, and coral-colored with black head; of the *vinagrillo* which trails a strong poison wherever it goes; of the lizard from whose bite no man can recover; the *eslaboncillo* which dies of anger if it fails to bite; the *cencoatl* which shines in the dark; the black-and-red spider whose sting fills your bones with agony which cannot be driven away until you have spent five days in a room filled

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with smoke. And all of these dangers leave out tarantulas and scorpions! Perhaps the poison of snakes and insects is not as deadly as the fear men have of them; but the terror and the venom together have killed many a fellow who had laughed at guns. At any rate, I was shivering like a child as I kneeled in the soft garden mold, until with a rush of hoofbeats, the men of the Señor arrived.

He himself came first, springing from his horse and into the shop, where that good fellow, Orthez, was now working away at the iron which he had taken from the fire, bright red showers of sparks squirting out under his hammer strokes, so that the shop was filled with a pulsation of ruddy light.

He kept on his hammering in spite of the appearance of the Señor, with big Gualtero behind him, and others pouring in as well.

"Orthez!" said the Señor.

The smith made his hammer hang in the air for the next stroke, but instead of answering with a word, he merely stared back at MacMore. I knew enough about the position of the Señor in San Clemente to feel the daring of such an attitude on the part of Orthez.

"Where are the men who rode those horses?" asked the Señor.

Orthez waved slowly the hand which was heavy with the hammer.

"They came here and asked the way."

"What way?"

"The way of this street."

"Quickly, Orthez! Where did they go?"

"I told them it was a blind alley and they would have to turn back. They did not do that. They jumped from their horses and went on."

"Went on where?"

"Down the street."

The Señor turned on his heel and leaped out through the doorway, singing out a command to Gualtero and one or two others to keep watch upon the blacksmith shop while he was gone. Twelve or twenty men may have followed him; others swarmed across the alley to examine the walls on that side and see where they could have been climbed.

It gave me an odd chill, as though somehow one part of me were fleeing out there before the hunters, while the rest of me kneeled there in the garden muck and, looking through the chink, saw Gualtero stalking up and down through the shop. The two peons who remained there with him looked as savage as any one could wish to see; but they remained back near the shadows of the entrance, and looked at nothing but the giant, as though he were made of fire and might burn them.

Says Gualtero presently: "Orthez!"

But Orthez was hammering again at the iron, which now had cooled to a dark red. He toiled at the work, and perspiration dripped from him.

"Orthez!" bellowed Gualtero, when his first hail is not answered.

He made a great stride forward; he extend a huge hand that looked able to crush the skull of the blacksmith like an eggshell. Then the blacksmith looked up, but only for one glance. He continued his hammering, merely grunting out with the strokes: "Get out of my light, you great hulk! You are only big enough to cast a shadow."

It was rude talk to six feet eight or nine of powerful muscle and bone; and I saw the two fighting men at the doorway draw a little closer, their teeth and their eyes flashing in savage expectancy, so that I could guess they had seen the monster at work many a time before this. But I was surprised to see that Gualtero's big hand remained suspended in the air for a moment—and then actually fell to his side!

And Orthez went on hammering, turning the iron with his tongs and criticizing it as a hawk might turn a small prey and eye it. He seemed totally in-

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different to the presence of the others, and taking the iron up, at last, he brushed close past Gualtero and gradually dipped the forging into the tempering tub. It entered with a mild and then a loud hiss that cast up a cloud of steam, through which Orthez went back to his forge.

"I have turned into a fat-brained fellow," declared Gualtero, "or else I would crack your head for you, or dash in all your teeth with one blow."

This unusual blacksmith answered:

"You are afraid, Gualtero. As a matter of fact, you would rather put your hands on a nest of rattlesnakes than to touch me. Because if you rest a mere finger on me, I'll be the death of you!"

He had been pushing a fresh piece of iron into the forge, but now as the smoke began to gush out while the bellows worked, he lifted his head and looked at the giant steadily, eagerly, with a dreadful greed in his eyes.

Gualtero went half a pace backward and then steadied himself; but he had to grapple at the handle of his revolver before he felt himself once more. And a wonderful thing it was to see that monster, that professional man crusher, recoil before the lean blacksmith. Gualtero blinked like a man come from darkness into light.

"You would use poison," he said. "There is no evil in San Clemente as bad as you are, Orthez!"

The blacksmith passed the red tip of his tongue over his dry lips, while still he stared at the big man.

"There are poisons that rot a man slowly, from day to day, Gualtero, and you would last half a year, as a slow fire eats up a big tree!"

I never saw such venom in a man's face; and it fairly made the eyes of Gualtero roll with fear. He turned his back on Orthez, muttering something about a dark night and a knife in the back, but I had a very distinct impression that he would leave this dangerous blacksmith alone forever. I was of the same mind, until I saw the ghost of a smile flicker on the lips and the eyes of Orthez, and I knew that he had played a small game, and played it for the benefit of Gualtero. It if were acting, I never saw better in all the days of my life! From that moment I put down Orthez as one of the most remarkable men I ever have seen.

The shop was half filled with smoke when the Señor came back from his vain hunt.

"Search the shop!" he said curtly, and added: "Orthez, you have been lying to me!"

The thoughtful eyes of Orthez rose from the ground and fixed upon those of the Señor, but here he had met his match. There is a saying that no wild beast can bear the eye of a man, but I have tried to look down the black panther, where it lay in a cage like a pool of shadow in which floated two shining yellow orbs. I looked long enough to bring him with a snarl to the bars of his cage, but I could not make his glance turn from mine, and it was I who looked away and went off with a chill down my spine. There was a good deal of the same expression in the eyes of the Señor, now. And the blacksmith looked down to the ground.

They were searching the shop in detail, tearing open the tool chest in the corner, and opening a big box that stood by the entrance, but they did not find what they looked for, of course.

Finally, Gualtero found the door to the garden and thrust it open.

He stood there not two paces away from me, and stared about him at the trees and the walls. I had my gun on him, taking aim at the ridiculous small head that was the chief feature of his ugliness.

"There is a garden here, where they may be hiding," said he.

"Search it!" called the Señor.

Gualtero strode off among the trees,

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while I flattened myself against the foot of the wall.

The moon shone with what seemed to me a terrible brightness, now, touching all the trees in the inclosure with silver, and gleaming on Gualtero as he disappeared; but it brightness merely helped to thicken the shadow that covered us at the base of the wall. So I still hoped. In the meantime, I heard Patrick MacMore speaking again inside the shop, and saying: "Orthez, five years ago you were a fat, good-natured man. What has happened to you?"

"Five years over a forge fire will dry the pith out of any man," said Orthez.

One of the party, however, now broke in: "He had a son called Juan who was killed five years ago. Some people say that he was riding with El Tigre."

"And some say," said Orthez in a low voice, "that he was stabbed from behind."

At that moment I heard the crunching of the soft soil under the foot of Gualtero, and the monster came looming toward us.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHOM THE TIGER HAS BITTEN.

I COULD forget the Señor, and the blacksmith, and everything under the sky, at that moment, except the great bulk of Gualtero as he came striding among the little orange trees. He carried a naked revolver in his hand, but the gun looked as tiny as a toy, rather than a full-sized .45—such was the hugeness of Gualtero.

Just by the wall of the smithy he stopped again. In two steps I could have reached him, and I sheltered the barrel of my gun under my arm, for fear lest he should see it glimmer. I can swear that he looked straight at us, and that was the moment when he stamped his great foot with impatience. Then he went hurriedly on into the shop.

Another year was taken from my life! I still stared to the side where the form of the giant seemed to be glimmering in the moonlight. It was a full minute before I could fully realize that he was gone.

I could listen to the voice of the Señor as he was talking to Orthez inside the shop.

"Now, then, amigo," said he, "it is true that El Tigre is my friend, and that I love him because of the good he has done for me; but it is equally true that when men ride out with him they are rough and wild and likely to follow their own pleasure rather than what is right. I don't believe that your son could have been killed while——"

"El Tigre gave the order, and the thing was done," said the blacksmith. "People do not carry tales for nothing, about El Tigre."

The Señor was quiet for a moment and I studied his face through the chink in the wall. He was very thoughtful, but he made up his mind in an instant.

"Whether you are right or wrong, you think that you have been harmed," he said. "Therefore, I shall do what El Tigre himself would have done. There are two horses. Take them with their saddles. They are yours."

"Are you the alcalde to make such judgments?" asked the blacksmith.

"They are yours and no man will ever ask them of you," said the Señor. "Gualtero!"

The giant had just come into the shop.

"The garden is empty," he said.

"We must have more men. We must scatter them," said the Señor, "and see that every man, and woman, and child, in San Clemente knows that the two are here, and who they are. The small one is to be taken alive. There are five thousand pesos for him living, and a bullet through the brain of the man who

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kills him. For the older man ten thousand pesos, and living or dead makes no difference."

While he talked, three or four of the crowd who seemed to be lieutenants had come forward and listened respectfully, and one of these I thought to be Cantaras, though he was back among the shadows so that I could not be sure.

These words MacMore poured out rapidly, then fairly ran from the shop and jumped upon a horse. The whole gathering scattered at once here and there.

And all the scene had dwindled to the thin blacksmith, patiently clinking his hammer on the ironwork. Finally, he put out one lantern, and taking the other one, he first paused to close the front doors of his shop and then came back into the garden.

He went slowly, like one who suddenly has become very old and weary. Then he stood beside us in the garden, where the lantern feebly invaded the moonlight.

"There are two things you can do ——" he began.

"We can thank you for our lives," said young MacMore.

"There are two things you can do," broke in the blacksmith harshly. "One is to take your horses and ride out of San Clemente if you can. The other is to put your horses in my stable and wait to be captured later on, while I am shot as a traitor for housing you."

He said this so dryly and deliberately that the suggestion he was making entered my mind with a start of wonder. That he, old Orthez the blacksmith, should take us in and hold us as his guests against the town! That he should make his house a fortress against the rest of the city, where every hand, most likely, would be ready to strike on behalf of El Tigre or the Señor!

"Man, man," said I, "are you suggesting that we should come and live in your house in spite of El Tigre?"

"I suggest it," he said.

"Although you know that we are bound to be captured?"

"I think you will be captured, but that I cannot really know. When two men stand together, why, sometimes a whole world of others can't hold them!"

He had thrown back his head a little as he said this, and there was a ring in his voice which I, turning my head, seem to hear again at this moment, so that the same thrill runs through me that ran through me then.

"Out of this, no good in the world can come to you," I told him.

He laughed, the first real laughter that I had heard from him, though it really sounded like the barking of a dog, far away.

"If there is anything that harms El Tigre," said he, "do you think that I cannot gain by it? If I could know that you are going to strike one blow against him, don't you see that I should be repaid? Aye, if I were to die the next moment—with the andirons for the Donna Alvarado uncompleted."

He laughed again, as he made this whimsical close.

I began to shake my head.

As a matter af fact, I had been so nearly mauled so many times in that one night by the claws of El Tigre, and I had had such a close rub with his men on the way south toward San Clemente, that by this time I was ready to throw up the sponge and admit that I was beaten. I was about to say so, and declare that we would slip out of the town as well as we could, when young Macmore replied to Orthez for me, saying: "It is almost as hard to get out of the town as it is to stay in the place. Of course we'll stay."

"I've decided to leave," I told him curtly, because I was angered that his patient courage should make me look so like a changeling and a coward.

"You may leave when you wish to leave," said the boy, "but I have to stay

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here." He added to the blacksmith: "If you will let me, señor!"

I could tell how the old man's heart leaped when he heard this calm, brave voice by the sudden stir of the lantern in his hand, which he held now in such a way that he could look more clearly into the face of my companion.

"You are welcome to stay with me," said he. "You are as welcome as if you were a blood brother of my own dead son. I would take in a dog off the street and care for it, if it had so much as bared its teeth against El Tigre! Come, come! Go get the horses and bring them around to the garden gate. I shall have it open by the time you get there. Or take your horse, young man, and let your friend go where he will!"

I hesitated, drawn by two ways as rarely a man ever can have been drawn. On one side my duty, my promise to the marshal, my hope of some great reputation taken out of this thing, drew me toward staying; and, besides that, it would be a sad thing to leave young MacMore after we had gone through so much together. But, on the other side, this affair seemed to me more and more hopeless. A man only needed to take a pace in San Clemente before seeing the fangs of El Tigre bared or being raked by his sharp claws; and the longer I stayed in that place the sweeter the life in the northland seemed to me. No matter how short a time spring lasted on the desert of Texas and Arizona it was of that spring that I thought, when the hills turned moss-green, and the flowers made all over the earth a dainty mist which was soon burned away. The men I knew there seemed stronger, wiser, braver, better, truer than they had been; and fried bacon, pone, and bitter black coffee appeared delicious food. I wanted to get back to those places and those men, when I heard my voice betraying me suddenly by saying to young MacMore: "If you want to stay, I'll stay, also."

I went with him through the shop, took Larry, and the other horse, and we glanced up and down the street. No one stirred in it, near us, but at the farther end, where it ran into a small plaza, I could see three horsemen pass at a gallop in the moonlight.

A door in the wall near by opened with a creak, and there we found the blacksmith waiting with his lantern. We led the horses in through the gateway, and after Orthez had jarred home the bolt behind us, he showed us into his stable.

It was a very small barn, in which there were two she-goats, together with a little tough-looking mule for all-round work or the saddle, even, to judge by the marks on its back; but there was also room for the two horses, and these we unsaddled and fed, while our host bore the lantern here and there to give us light.

At this time he said nothing, but watched us caring for the horses until we had ended, when he merely remarked: "Fat horse, wise master," and took us up from the stable toward his house, leading the way close under the garden wall, for the obvious reason that this cut off the chances of his neighbors spying upon him.

We were almost at the rear door when it opened suddenly before us, and this gave me an uncanny start.

"Your wife?" I said to Orthez.

"My wife is dead," he said shortly.

We went in behind him, past an old Negro with a withered, ugly mask of a face in which the eyes appeared as dead as the eyes of a statue. He closed the door behind us and stumped along afterward on a wooden leg which made very little noise because it had been secured with a thick pad at the end.

We came into a cool room of rather a good size for such a tiny house, and there our host motioned us to seats on chairs covered with flossy white goatskins. He asked if we would eat, while

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the Negro brought a lamp and put it on a side table. I was hungry enough, and so was MacMore, so Orthez told the servant to bring what he had; and that turned out to be cold roast kid, tortillas, cold beans cooked with plenty of pungent peppers, and goat's milk for a drink. MacMore could not help making a face over this, but I had grown used to it long years before, and accepted it gratefully.

Orthez noted our anxious looks at the Negro and he put us at rest by saying simply: "El Tigre bit off the other leg."

That was enough to make us feel sure of the man, and it began to appear that the entire life of the blacksmith was organized for the purpose of opposing the great bandit. Otherwise, Orthez did not talk while we ate, but sat at one side smoking cornucopia-shaped Mexican cigarettes and watching our appetites.

As we ended, I said softly to the boy in English: "Denny, you know what great danger you are facing by staying here?"

He looked squarely at me, which was his custom, and answered: "The man they call the Señor is the man I want. He is my brother."

CHAPTER XX.

MORE OF THE TIGER.

IT was what I had hoped he would not understand. There was no way in which he could have seen Patrick MacMore except through the chink hole which I had constantly been occupying, but the mere sound of the voice had been enough for him.

What would the reaction of Denny be? Why, his face was as hard as the face of a fighting man, and his eye was a steady light. He looked older than he had been that morning—and no great wonder—and there was more man and less boy to him.

It made me hurt to think of the pain he had been enduring all the while, without saying a word. But I blundered on, saying: "Why didn't you let him know you were there?"

"What would have happened to you, in that case?" asked Denny.

"Why, you could have protected me with your own brother!" I suggested, to bring him out.

He didn't hesitate, but answered like a flash: "I used to know him pretty well, but I never knew him well enough to change his mind. He wants to kill you, Joe. You know it, and I know it, too. And nothing I could say would change him!"

"Do you think, Denny," said I, "that all things considered, it might be a wise thing for you to get out of this town and stay out? If he will pay five thousand pesos to get rid of you—unharmed—it means that he doesn't want to see you!"

"Of course he doesn't. It would be almost as bad as seeing one's conscience face to face. His gold mine!"

He laughed a little, hollowly, and the pain that the boy felt made his eyes waver from side to side.

"Well, he may have the gold mine. He probably has."

"El Tigre is his gold mine!" said Denny bitterly.

He had hit on something close to the truth, I felt, and so I couldn't very well argue with him.

"Then," said I, "I don't see what your business is here."

"Don't you?" replied Denny darkly. He burst out: "D'you undersand that we've been living on the money that he sent us from his 'gold mine'? We've turned it into clothes, and house, and food, and education, and pleasure, and everything. We owe all that to El Tigre—who stabs men in the back and—bites off their legs at the knee!"

He laughed a little, saying this, and his laugh was a snarl.

"Are you going to take him out of

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Mexico and make him pay back what he has sent you, or help to pay it back?"

"You sneer at the idea," replied Denny with the quiet of a deep resolution, "but out of Mexico he has to come, and I'm the only one to take him —with your help, perhaps, Joe."

I rested my chin on my hand and grinned at the boy, because he was so full of hope and of fire. Every time we had come near to the Señor, it had been like catching a galloping horse by the tail—we had been knocked head over heels. But still he kept up a confident spirit. He would have raised the heart of a wooden image. He would have put hope into a leaden statue.

"All right, Denny," said I, "when I'm through taking El Tigre and shipping him north—express—then I'll come over to you and give you a hand with your brother."

The blacksmith then broke in suddenly: "Two men can stand against the world!"

He had not been able to understand our actual words, but he had sensed our strife and this was his comment. Denny smiled at him, and I shrugged my shoulders. For my part, I felt as though I were trying to walk on the verge of a precipice with my eyes blinded. I wanted light to see so much as a possible way out. Then, by scheming and using all the might in our hands and our hearts, perhaps we might accomplish something.

I put a point-blank question to Orthez: "How much power has the Señor?"

He replied with another question: "How much power has that same El Tigre?"

"But he can't have as much."

"He has more, in a way. Some people say that El Tigre is only the knife, but the Señor is the hand that uses it."

"I believe that!" broke out Denny. "Patrick never would be the man to play second fiddle. He would have to lead!"

"You'd rather have him a great robber than no robber at all?" said I.

And Denny blushed and hung his head a little. He could not help that blind pride in the prowess of The MacMore. I suppose that that was natural enough.

The Negro was taking off the dishes now. We sat back and smoked. It was the cool of the night. We had escaped from so much danger in the last hours that with food inside us, and smoke in our lungs, and a quiet place to sit, our spirits could not help but rise a little.

"The Señor," said Orthez, after he had patiently listened to our comments in a strange tongue, "is such a man that nobody but El Tigre could make him second."

"I have seen the Señor," said I. "But I've never in my life heard El Tigre described."

He nodded. "You have come a long distance," said he.

"I come from a country where El Tigre has made a great many raids. Almost enough to cause a war. I could name seven banks he has looted, Señor Orthez. But we don't know much about his looks."

"Why not? You have surely captured some of his men."

"We have. But most of them fight like wild cats, so that they're already dying before we take them; and the ones who live to be hanged are more afraid of El Tigre than they are of death."

The eye of Orthez flashed a little. "El Tigre is a great man!" said he.

All at once he had almost forgotten his hatred of that man in his pride that the Mexican race could claim such a hero! I hardly blamed him, because that name El Tigre was beginning to haunt me like a legend of a dragon and giants.

"I can tell you how he looks," said Orthez. "He is pure Indian. And like an Indian he looks!"

He said that with pride, also, and

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again I did not blame him. For no matter how King Alcohol and adopting some of the ways of the white man have spoiled the Indians, I've known a score of them, or a hundred, worthy of meeting the finest white men in the world on even terms.

"I've heard that, of course," I answered. "He even has the old fashion of very long hair."

"It falls down past his shoulders," said Orthez. "And when he is on the warpath, he is dressed like an Indian, too. That is, he wears a loin cloth, leggings, moccasins, and a light robe which is more often off his shoulders than on them. In his hair he wears eagle feathers because he is a chief in his own right, as I have heard."

"He is a big man, and very strong," I said. "That much I have heard."

"He is a very big man," said the blacksmith. "You have seen this Gualtero? The people here in San Clemente are apt to say that he is the strongest man in the world, but the men of El Tigre say that he is even stronger than Gualtero."

I blinked a little, at this. However, that might be something that had been stretched a little in the making of the legend.

"There is something terrible about his face," I suggested, "or is that only a story?"

"His whole face is twisted to the right side by a great scar," said Orthez. "But no matter what men may tell you, it is not the scar that makes him appear terrible. It is the eye and the voice of El Tigre."

"You have seen him?"

"No. But my son saw him, and told me. He had joined the band. He was young and foolish and in love. I begged him to stay with me, but he wanted a great deal of money quickly. He had fallen in love with a woman who was beyond his reach. But he would not believe that. He thought he could make a ladder of gold and climb to her. So he rode with the men of El Tigre. I know that they went a great distance to the north, and that when they had come to the right place, they met together on the soil of the gringo."

He grew excited as he talked.

"They had ridden north in little groups. They crossed the Rio Grande and met together at the appointed place. It was night, and over the hill they saw an Indian chief riding, with the starlight glistening on his naked breast. His rifle was balanced across the pommel of his saddle. He rode a great horse with a savage head. And my son, who was a brave man, said that he knew this man could not fail. When El Tigre came closer, he saw the long hair, and the twisted face, and the eyes under heavy black brows, and he knew there was no other leader in the world like this man.

"All that night, wherever danger was, there was El Tigre also. They came back loaded with gold and with American money. My boy had his share. That one share was almost enough to make him rich, as riches go in San Clemente. He could have bought a house and land. But when he went to talk to the lady, she only pitied him. Although she liked him very much, too, because he was a handsome man. There was no handsomer man in all of San Clemente."

He made a little pause, here, as his eyes rested on the young listening face of Denny MacMore, and I knew he was saying to himself that Denny, even, was hardly a finer-looking fellow than his dead boy.

"But he was only the son of a blacksmith, and she, of course, was an Alvarado. Then he received word that he was not to trouble the lady any more. He received word from one of El Tigre's men. He was furious and cursed El Tigre and all his ways. The next day he saw he had done a foolish

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thing. He told me. I ordered him to ride as fast as he could, but he was overtaken and killed in the road."

He made an end to his story, saying simply: "That is what I know of El Tigre. He stays off in his wilderness and makes the Señor organize everything for him. El Tigre lays the great plan, and he comes down to command in the midst of the raid. But the Señor is his lieutenant. You have seen the lieutenant, so you can well imagine the captain."

I had, as a matter of fact, seen the lieutenant, but I could only dimly imagine what the captain might be, because The MacMore fairly well filled my mind.

However, I could make a wild mental picture of the scarred face, and the sweeping, long, black hair, and the glistening coppery shoulders of El Tigre as he rode into battle. It was almost enough to make the Señor seem the lesser man; almost, but not quite!

CHAPTER XXI.

"LA CARMELITA."

WE talked no more that night, for we were enormously tired, though it was not too late for the band to be playing in the Plaza Municipal. I listened to it when we lay on mattresses laid down in the second story of Orthez's house. There was nothing to upset me except one of the boy's attacks of conscience just before I got to sleep. He was in a fury of trouble because he felt that perhaps we were not doing right in staying on in the house of Orthez, and thereby drawing down some degree of trouble on the head of that good man. I asked him if we should go out and ask for rooms in a hotel, and when this did not pacify him, I pointed out what was the simple truth, that the blacksmith enjoyed nothing in the world so much as the thought that he was sheltering men who might eventually do some harm to El Tigre or the Señor.

This had enough weight to stop Denny's chatter. And in ten seconds he was sound asleep. His emotions could be turned off as suddenly as they were turned on, if one only knew the proper way to use the key. I fell asleep myself, listening to the far-off strains of the band as it swung into the eternal "La Paloma."

I was awakened by a touch on the shoulder. It wakened me from what had become my usual dream of the man-tiger. This time it was a tiger I shot, but the dead tiger turned into a living man and caught me by the throat.

"You sound as if you're choking," said Denny, as he woke me.

He looked as fresh and as cheerful as could be, smiling down at me while he asked his question.

"I was choking," said I, "but that was only in a dream, and I expect we'll be choked by a real rope before the day's over."

"Hanging is an easy death," says the boy. "But there's trouble started already."

That had me out of the bed in an instant, and I was soon dressed. I asked him what he thought the trouble might be?

"They've found out that we're in the house, I guess," said Denny.

I got to the window in a step, and looking down to the street through the shutters, I saw fifty people milling in front of the blacksmith shop and around other parts of the property of Orthez. They were talking seriously together, with a great many gesticulations and a good deal of excitement, but I noticed first of all that very few of the men carried weapons. At least, none were displayed.

"They're not after us," I said to Denny.

His face altered. I had not noticed how strained it was before.

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"Then why on earth are they out there as if it were a promenade?"

"Why, because we've been there."

"Have we made it holy ground?" says Denny with his grin.

"That or the reverse. It doesn't make much difference."

"Nothing to do but come and waste time over us?"

"You can put up all your money that San Clemente is talking about nothing else this morning. You can trust that this town leads a quiet life most of the time. There's not much to talk about."

"How do you know that?"

"Where El Tigre keeps his lair, do you think that lesser crooks are going to try their handiwork?"

"I suppose not," says Denny.

"You can bet your boots on it. San Clemente is thrilled up to the top of its collar because something has happened in the town worth talking about. They've come to beg old Orthez to let them look at the horses. He'll tell them he has the horses to sell and not to look at. He's a hard one!"

"He's one of the finest men I ever met!" said Denny, breaking out into one of his enthusiasms. "Some day I'm going to do something for that man."

"I'll tell you exactly what to do," said I.

"Yes, tell me, Joe."

"Cut El Tigre's throat," says I.

He was able to laugh at that, but not loudly. And we went down hunting for food as quietly as mice.

The Negro had breakfast waiting for us. He went about serving us with a wonderful smoothness and agility, considering that wooden leg of his. Afterward, while we sat about and smoked Mexican cigarettes, he told us how El Tigre had "bitten that leg off at the knee."

In a northern raid, he had been present in the vault room when a safe was cracked, and the force of the explosion had toppled a section of the outer wall, and pinned him helplessly under some large fragments. They could not pull him out, his foot was so caught; but one of El Tigre's chief principles of action was to leave no prisoners behind him. Therefore, the brute with his own hands had amputated the leg at the knee, gagging the poor man to prevent him from screaming. With a fiendish ingenuity so horrible that it made one gasp, to hear José tell of it, this monster in human form stopped the bleeding, wound a bandage hastily around the mutilated limb and forced that poor José to ride with them twenty miles to a place of safety across the Rio Grande! It took him three months to recover,—and he had one deep hunger left—which was to give El Tigre one per cent of the agony which he had suffered. He was not half so old as he seemed. That terrible experience had turned him into a white-haired mask of a man at a single stroke.

Well, I had heard sufficiently horrible things about El Tigre before this, but nothing that rubbed my nerves raw quite as badly as José's story. As for Denny, it made him faint. He sat afterward with his head in his hands.

"And to think that my brother knows such things as this and still keeps working for El Tigre!" said he.

Gradually, it had dawned on me that nothing much mattered to the boy except his brother and his brother's place in the world. It was not simple love; he had worshiped Patrick MacMore, and now the head of the family was the servant of a human monster! I thought that if he had ever seen in Patrick's eye the look that I had seen there, he would not have been surprised to hear that cruelty did not upset The MacMore a great deal.

Orthez came into the house at noon for his lunch.

He was greatly changed. It seemed to me that there was a glow of light in his eyes and of color in his cheeks. He seemed younger. His step was light,

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and he actually smiled without sarcasm as he talked. What I guessed was the truth. All of San Clemente was buzzing about the two gringos who had invaded the town hunting for the Señor. No, it was El Tigre himself that they wanted. They had come. They had twice slipped out of the hands of the Señor and his servants. It was said that the Señor himself had for a time been helpless before the gun of one of them! And then the prisoner, the younger one, had been snatched away by the other, and the two of them had disappeared from the ken of man!

Put in that way, it was enough to excite the townsmen. It was fairly determined that the strange pair had not left San Clemente. No matter how cunning the two gringos might be, every road out of the town had been kept under a strict watch, and a cordon, in a sense, had been flung about the place. The two desperadoes were on the inside, but where could they be hiding? Of course, in a day or two the searchers would discover them, and San Clemente then would have a chance to enjoy something more than a bullfight!

I could agree with that part of the news.

Orthez was quietly on fire with pleasure. The man seemed to care nothing at all for his own life, so long as he might have the exquisite pleasure of doing some harm to the slayers of his son.

"But the Señor," says he, "will have punishment enough. For him, I wish nothing but a long life!"

We asked him what he could mean by this and he exclaimed through his teeth that the same woman who had sent is own boy to his death would be able to plague the Señor. For he was to marry her!

It was another shock for young Denny. Moisture rolled down his face, and I could see why. Already this evil life had a sufficient hold on his brother, but if The MacMore married into the country, nothing would get him away.

He wanted to know who the woman could be, and he was told that it was the Señorita Alvarado, who was better known by reputation through San Clemente as "La Carmelita." She was the flower of San Clemente's beauties, but she had reached the advanced age of twenty without ever marrying or considering marriage. She had broken hearts without number. And it was on account of her, of course, that poor young Orthez had started on the wild career that so quickly ended in his death. The face of the blacksmith wrinkled with a sublime hatred when he spoke the girl's name, and I could hardly blame him.

He went on at a great rate, to prophesy what would become of The Señor. Eaten with a terrible jealousy every instant he was away from his wife, devoured by suspicion, which would all be lulled to sleep again when he was in the presence of the beauty, he would alternate between heaven and hell until at last his life was no longer worth living. His temper would break. He would be despised by those he had commanded; fall from his position; be cast from the band, and at the moment of his downfall she, waiting for the moment to hurt him the most, would promptly abandon him.

Let him live, then, until from a broken heart and a wretched soul, he took his own life.

When Orthez had carried on for a while like this, I could not help breaking in: "Your countrymen are great lovers of beauty, Orthez, but we from the north are a good deal colder of blood. I don't think that the Señor is apt to break his heart about the woman, no matter how pretty she may be. And if she's a great flirt whom he can't trust, he'll simply get rid of her and never see her again!"

Orthez heard me out with his sinister

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grin, to which I was beginning to grow accustomed.

"Señor," said he, "you are a man who has traveled a great deal?"

"That's fair to admit," said I.

"You have seen many beautiful women?"

"I've seen a few," said I.

"However," says he, "you never have seen La Carmelita, and, therefore, you have seen nothing."

He went off for his siesta, as soon as he had said that, and I smiled at young Denny.

"That's like a Mexican," said I. "There isn't a town in the country that doesn't contain the most beautiful woman in the world!"

But Denny was not smiling at all; he was looking at visions through the ceiling.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN BORROWED PLUMAGE.

WHEN we saw Orthez after his nap, he told us that we ought to remain quietly in his house for several days, during which the excitement about us would increase for some time, and at last would die down as people took it for granted that we had managed in some manner to escape. In the meantime, he would open negotiations for the sale of the horses, but would prolong them without coming to an actual sale. These negotiations would free him from any suspicion of harboring the mounts for our advantage.

This seemed to both Denny and me the height of common sense. I knew that in Mexico sensations die out almost as quickly as they spring to life; and I could fairly hope that within three or four days our story would be forgotten in San Clemente. When that time came, and little crowds ceased buzzing around the spot where the strangers had disappeared, then we could attempt something of importance. In the meantime, we could map the town in our minds and lay our final plans with the greatest care.

I was in a state of composure, therefore; but Denny was far from that condition. He kept moving restlessly about all day, and in the late afternoon he told me that the story about La Carmelita had completely destroyed all his hopes. The excitement of The MacMore's business with El Tigre would in itself be almost enough to hold Patrick; but a woman he loved would make a bond which no amount of family persuasion could dissolve.

This was clear enough, but I was not prepared for the point to which it led Denny.

"Very well," says he, ticking off the points on his fingers. "If I can't persuade Patrick directly and myself, then I have to persuade him through somebody else. Who could that be?"

"Me, perhaps," said I, laughing at him. "Listen to me, old son. There's nobody in the world who is going to persuade your brother. He's his own master as much as any man I've ever heard of or ever seen. Now I'm going to tell you the exact story of what happened between him and me."

I did, too, exactly as I've written it down, and throwing in a few extras that didn't make the picture of The MacMore in action any gentler. He listened to me as though he were hearing the Bible read aloud. It never occurred to him to doubt anything that I said, but I think his grief because of the grim nature of his brother was about fifty per cent offset by his pride in the strength of The MacMore.

"Even you were afraid of him, Joe?" he asked me half a dozen times, and then he pondered on the answer, when I said yes.

Then I finished by asking him if that was the sort of a man who could be persuaded away from his own inclination, and Denny shook his head stubbornly.

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"He's no longer his own master," he insisted.

"Who is his master, then?" said I.

"The woman he loves," said Denny.

I threw up my arms. "His only master is the monster he works for!" I told Denny from my heart. "But even if the woman he loves commands him, what good does that do you?"

"Suppose she could be persuaded that Patrick has to be taken away from Mexico and El Tigre? Why, then she would beg him to go, and he would do it, and there you are!"

He finished off this explanation with an exclamation of pleasure at his own cogent reasoning, and I laughed to hear him.

"Who is to do the persuading?" said I. "Who is going to tell La Carmelita that little story and decide her to leave her native country? Great Scott, Denny," I ended, "you talk like a crazy man, if you'll excuse me for saying so!"

"You don't think it could be done?" says he, his face falling.

"Never in the world."

That threw him into gloom which lasted the rest of the day, but toward the evening I found him talking to the Negro, José, and asking questions about where the house of La Carmelita stood. I saw at once what that was driving toward, and it frightened me. If he exposed himself, I felt that he was a gone goose. It was true that the reward the Señor offered for the apprehension of Denny was a reward offered for his living body; but it would not be so easy to take a wild cat like Denny alive. If they tried to lay hands on him, he would force them to give him his quietus.

That was what was in my mind as I listened to the talk with José. Finally, I broke right in and said: "José, tell this young fellow if he possibly can get into the house of Alvarado?"

José opened his eyes as if I had asked if a man could jump to the moon. Then he pointed out that the Alvarados were extremely wealthy, kept a house filled with faithful *mozos* who would like nothing so well as knifing any intruder, and that, besides, the house was under the eye of picked men of the great Señor.

That was as convincing an answer as I could have wished for.

But the Negro went on to say that there was only one way to see the girl, and that was at the promenade on the Plaza Municipal in the evening, when every one went there. There she could be seen accompanied by her mother or her duenna.

I was relieved by this, too, because no one could be so reckless as to undertake to accost a woman on the promenade in the plaza. That is, a woman of the upper classes. Of the lower orders, it could not be said, because among them it was a sign of bravery for a fellow to break in among the girls and walk with his sweetheart for a round, in spite of the jeers and the mockeries. But among the upper orders, there was no offense as great as that of interfering with the ladies. In addition, by exposing himself to the eyes of the crowd, young MacMore was sure to get himself recognized.

I was not so sure of that dare-devil, however, as to let the matter drop here, but I explained everything to him, exactly as it was. He listened to me, and assured me that he had no such wild impulse in mind.

I believed him. How could I help believing that he had at least that much common sense?

Well, the end was that at supper we sat a long time over the food with Orthez, and afterward he brought out some abominable red wine, which he considered delicious. I added two parts of water to mine, and so managed to stand it and remained sipping the stuff and talking to Orthez and to José, who came back into the room familiarly after he had cleared up the dishes. But young

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Denny declared that his head was ringing, it ached so badly, and he went off to his room to lie down, he said.

I had a grand talk with Orthez that night. The old fellow was a well of wisdom. He knew his own nation, for one thing; the weakness and the glories of the Mexican, and he was as willing to criticize as he was to praise. I remember that he made one very good point, which was that the ideal of the Mexican was still the old ideal of the Indian—the warpath and the glories of the warpath. Nobody could blame them very much for wanting to show their courage, and show it they did; but it would be infinitely better for the nation when it settled down to work as large sections already were doing. He told me a great deal about his own experiences as a blacksmith. He was one of those naturally cultured men who are able to judge the whole world by the small section of it that passes through their own lives.

It was very late before I decided to go to bed and said good night to Orthez; but when I got up to our room and entered softly to keep from waking the boy, the first thing I saw was the white moonlight falling on his empty bed.

The sheepskin had not been at all disturbed!

I stood there dazed, for a moment. Then I noticed a heap of clothes in a corner, and when I examined them, they turned out to be the outfit of Denny.

That was another facer for me.

I stood with those clothes draggling down from my hand to the floor and feeling that the world was at an end. I had not realized before how fond I was of the youngster, but now it came over me with a rush that, in spite of his headlong foolishness, in spite of the fact that he could not ride, rope, shoot, make a camp, cook a meal, or so much as sharpen a knife without turning the edge of it, he was the cleanest and straightest and bravest lad I ever had run across.

I went down to Orthez, half staggering, and he met me at his door with his sardonic eyes glittering with excitement.

"We shall see," said he, when I told him briefly what I had found.

We went rapidly through the other parts of the house, thinking that he might possibly have left our room to find some cooler place for sleep; but there was no sign of him, and at last we went into the apartment which had once been reserved for Orthez's son.

There he opened a closet and showed me that there were clothes thrown into disarray.

I did not see the meaning of this for a moment. I was too stunned by my fear for the boy to make head or tail of it.

But Orthez said quietly: "He has dressed himself in my son's clothes and he has left the house."

I repeated the exact words after him, like a parrot.

"And of course that," said Orthez, "is the end."

"That is the end for poor Denny," said I. "They will surely skewer him if he tries to speak to the girl."

I had told him beforehand of the talk about La Carmelita, so that he understood what I meant.

"They will take his skin off and hang it in the plaza as a lesson in manners to other foreigners," agreed Orthez.

"I've got to get there and stop him," said I.

"Do you know what time it is?" said Orthez.

That stopped me in a flash.

It was late, and of course Denny had left long before. When he got up from the table, he must have started his preparations and have slipped out through a window immediately afterward. Whatever mischief he could get into, he had landed in it by this time.

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"It is time," said Orthez, "that you and I should look to the safety of our own scalps. Because the boy is taken before this, and being taken, they will follow his back trail to my house."

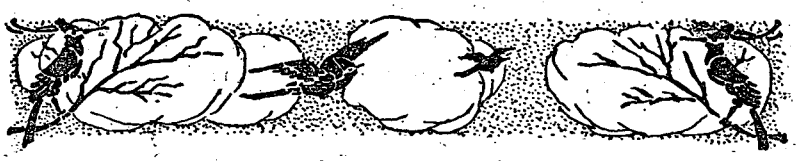
"If you think that he'll tell where he was hiding, you're wrong," I assured him.

"I don't think that," said Orthez, "but they will have his clothes to go by, and from them and the marks of the tailor, they will surely be able to trace the clothes back to my house.

"After that, amigo mio, we are dead men!"

I stared at him, realizing that what he said was undoubtedly true; and as we stood there motionless, looking at one another and seeing our fears, I heard a hand tap softly at the street door—or was it a sound made in testing the fastening of the shutter on the street?

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.



SHORTAGE OF BIRD HOUSES!

THE department of agriculture is seemingly indefatigable, and no item that comes within its jurisdiction goes unnoticed by its vigilance. It might be said, indeed, to take in this particular case a bird's-eye view of the situation. For it appears that there is a shortage of houses for birds, that is, for itinerant birds. It is not, so far as can be learned, the purpose of the department to establish a "chain of national bird hotels" across the continent, as our proprietors of mammoth human caravanseries would do in like circumstances. No, the way of the authorities is better. First you decide what kind of bird traveler you would like to entertain, then you find out what kind of hotel he prefers to occupy, and then you go to work and plant the gourd that, if carefully tended and harvested, will one day spring from the ground just as if some first-class bird-house contractor had undertaken to erect it for you.

This begins to sound like the story of the House that Jack Built in the nursery rhyme. It is, however, no laughing matter, but a perfectly serious and carefully thought-out plan to which such grave and reverend authorities as the bureau of biological survey, the division of food habits research, and the office of horticultural and crop diseases of the bureau of industry have lent their efforts. The information will be found in Leaflet No. 36 of their publications.

There is a large variety of gourds which will make suitable bird houses, some with delightful names such as the Turk's turban gourd; the African pipe; the dipper, the bottle—these last mentioned perhaps a little too suggestive of times past to be entirely pleasant to the gayer birds—the calabash, a word of romance and delight; the Hercules-club and powder-horn gourds—these should attract the warrior birds; and finally the most purely domestic-sounding spoon and sugar-trough gourds—these one would probably recommend for birds traveling in family parties.

The final touch is put to your hospitality when the gourd is ready to be occupied. Having decided on the type of bird you wish to entertain, you simply cut in your gourd a hole that will accommodate him. The dimension of the hole will be found, of course, in the omniscient Leaflet No. 36.

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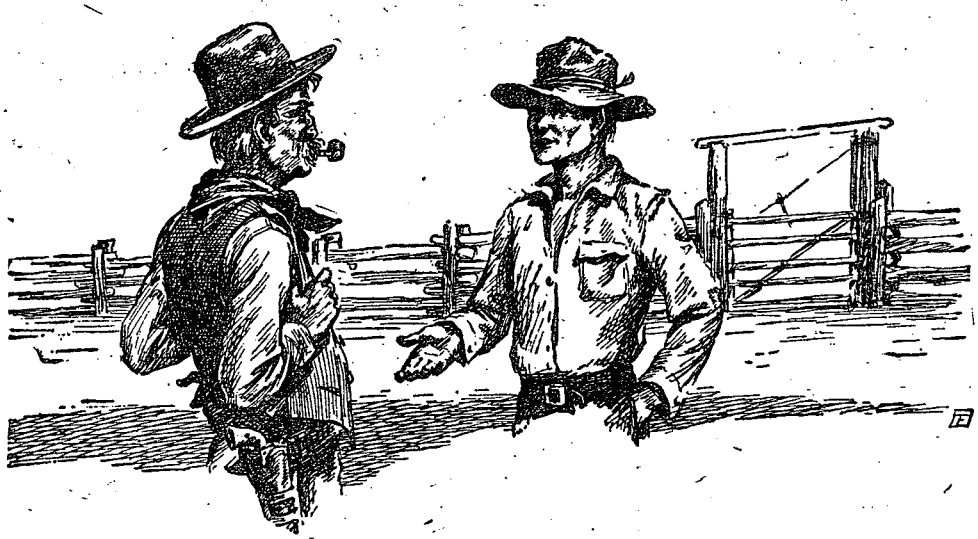

Twenty And Prunes

By George Cory Franklin

Author of "Raised on Trouble," etc.

HE sure appeared to be nearer *non compos mentis,* which is French for "no men in camp"—just another way of sayin' "Nobody home!"—than any cowpoke that had ever drawed twenty a month and prunes from the Bar Cross spread. He rolled in one afternoon when we're gettin' the horses shod and the wagons greased preparatory to driftin' for the Cochetope Range in the mornin'. I'm roddin' the Bar Cross, so the boys send him to me.

"What's the show for work?" he asks.

I looked him over, and my first hunch was to shake my head, but I said "Yes," instead. Except for a pair of twinklin' blue eyes that seems to think the world is stagin' a funny play solely for his benefit, he looks like somethin' the puppy coyotes had been playin' rough with. His clothes was ragged, his hat flopped down over his face; his boots was run over at the heel. All this might have been put on for effect. I've known riders to dress up that way so's to make a foreman give 'em a few days' work out of sympathy, and then when they had got a chance to show how good they was they'd gradually dig up a better outfit.

But this boy, who I judged to be in his early twenties, couldn't have got his cheeks hollowed out like that except one way, and that was bein' short of grub for days and weeks at a stretch. He hadn't any blankets, either, and ordinarily that would have settled it, 'cause while a cowboy will offer to share his bed with a dog if the dog's cold, they resent havin' the boss wish a partner onto 'em. In spite of all that, I'd give him a job, and here we was almost ready to drift to the high range where it's likely to snow any day.

"Who's the new man, 'Cinders'?" asks Tom Mason, owner of the Bar Cross, when he sees him saunter in with the rest to the supper table.

"He's a new rider I just hired," I answered.

"Well, don't hire any more tramp rid-

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ers," he says, "'cause we've got men enough now, and, besides, I hired a young feller that's sure a top hand, last night in Monte. He'd ought to be here soon. He had to wait for his outfit to come on the train," Mason explains.

Brooks, the cook, always gives us an extra good supper the night before we leave the home ranch, and then feeds us burned biscuits the first meal, from the chuck wagon. He does this to make us think about how much better the grub is at the ranch so's we'll push the work and get back as soon as we can. Brooks hates to cook on a camp fire.

Names just seem to suggest themselves to a cowboy out of the blue sky, and when I'd seen this new man I'd hired reach for a washbasin and take it right out from under Case Hardy's hand —Case, bein' the quickest-tempered and fightin'est man on the Bar Cross—I'd just naturally branded him "Bonehead." And when I see him passin' up a stew made of tender beef with plenty of onions and spuds to flavor it, and eat only some dry bread, and drink nothin' but water, that name became a fixture with me, and I put him down on the time book as "The Bonehead." The name stuck, though it wasn't a week till it had been shortened to "Bony," and in the mouths of "Shorty," "Pewee," and "Slim" it's a kind of a pleasant-soundin' name. What I mean, there's nothin' nasty about the way they say it; but when Case Hardy says it, somethin' inside you sorta twitches like a dog's foot does when he's sleepin' and somebody touches the stubby hairs between his toes. Just like I'd picked a name for The Bonehead out of nuthin' and nowhere, I knew that trouble between this new man and Case Hardy was as sure as that Blue Panther would buck on a cold mornin'; and no matter whether that name of The Bonehead was always goin' to fit, or not, my judgment about the other play was plumb accurate.

Nobody paid much attention to the new man. They was all talkin' about how many head we would gather on Squaw Creek; whether or not Buck Cassidy, the bronc peeler, had got the hammer-headed buckskin so that he could be trusted to work after cows; and the danger of ridin' a slick-shod horse on South Clear Creek meadows after the snow comes.

I heard the talk, of course. A good foreman always tries to know what his men are thinkin' about so's to judge how they'll work under certain conditions, which ones are likely to be lookin' for a chance to do some dare-devil stunt, and which ones may shy at danger. But while I'm listenin' to them and some final instructions Tom is givin' me, too, I'm watchin' The Bonehead. He eats slow like he's just beginnin' to taste food, and most of the time his eyes is down; but when he does look up they are always lined across the table at Case Hardy, like he thinks he knows him but ain't quite certain.

We was about half through supper when Tom motioned toward the door. "Here's that feller I hired now," he says.

I looked around, expectin' to see a man of thirty-five, range-hardened and tough, and instead here's a feller that might have just dropped in from Hollywood, or a dude ranch, the way he's got up. He ain't a bad-lookin' kid, but sure he's no cow-puncher, and I'm surprised that Mason has hired him, 'cause Tom Mason is an old cattleman that ought to be able to tell a range rider by the way he'd sit on a bench, let alone how he'd talk. Ted Mathews, his name is, and he had a line of range lingo that he must have got from one of these books of range terms I've seen. Anyway, he sprung stuff we'd none of us ever heard of, and he had a outfit that would have been swell at a rodeo parade.

Everybody was too busy next morning to pay much attention to either one

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of the new men. We're a pretty good-sized outfit, runnin' three wagons with ten men to each one, and that means a remuda of a hundred and fifty head of broke horses and a few green ones.

Shorty is straw boss of one wagon, and Slim runs the other one, while I always take Pewee with me as a *segundo* in case I have to go to either of the other wagons for anything. In dividing the riders, I took Ted Mathews and The Bonehead in my outfit, which means that I'm goin' to be short-handed for men that know the range, and I can see that Case and my other men ain't tickled any at havin' these two new men in their gang. We always make this round-up a sort of a game. The three parts of the range have about the same number of cattle on 'em, and Mason hangs up a bonus of a hundred dollars to be divided among the riders of the wagon that brings out the most cattle.

Two people more unlike than Bony and Ted you never saw. Bony forks a horse like he had been born on one, and when his pony breaks into a lope you see a sort of a ripple start at his head and go through his body plumb to his feet, like he was part of the horse. Ted's back is straight as a ramrod. His legs look like they'd been fitted to a pattern, and even his arms are always in just the same position. He works all right in a stiff, copy-book sort of a way, is kind to his stock, and is willin' to do what I ask him. But any old cowman will tell you that a cowboy has got to go farther than that. He must do all that he's told to do, plus.

The first instance of Ted's not bein' a practical cow hand that came out was when I sent him alone to circle Woodchuck Park. He came in about an hour ahead of the rest of the riders, with a little more than half the cattle he should have had. "There was some cow tracks leading on up through that pass at the far end," he told me, "but you said clearly that I was to circle that park and bring out all the cattle there, so I didn't follow those tracks."

I began to feel my mad comin' up, but before I could begin to cuss him for not usin' judgment, The Bonehead interrupted. "'Sall right, boss, I got 'em," he says.

I just looked at him for a minute straight. "Are you sure?" I wants to know.

"Yeah," he says, "the park is as clean as a hound's tooth."

Up till then the boys hadn't played any tricks, but the next day they fixed up one to get Ted throwed. We was goin' to make the longest circle we would make on the round-up, and was each takin' an extra horse that we'd leave where we would pick him up on the way back. I saw Case Hardy leadin' the Blue Panther, which is the buckin'est horse in Case's string, and wondered why he was takin' him; but I had too much on my mind to ask questions. If Case wanted to take a shakin' up at the end of a hard day's ride, that was his business.

I saw through it that evening, though, when Ted come in ridin' a little gentle brown horse that Bony had led away in the mornin', and a half hour afterward The Bonehead came shufflin' along on the Blue Panther, and that Blue horse didn't need anybody to tell him that he'd been rode, either. I saw Case and one of the other riders give The Bonehead a sour look for spoilin' their fun. I thought I'd ought to post Bony and put him on his guard, so next mornin' I made it a point to ride a piece with him. When we're out of hearin' range I begins.

"You can't do two men's work," I says, "and there ain't no call for it, either. If Ted can't keep up his end, I'll fire him."

For the first time Bony's face showed some sign of him thinkin' like other folks. "Aw, don't fire him, Cinders," he says, as near beggin' a favor as his kind ever does. "Give him a chance to

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learn. He's a good feller, and he's a-tryin' hard, but he has to have experience."

"How did you come to uncork the Blue Panther for him yesterday?" I asks.

Bony's face don't show a grin like most boys would and, except for them eyes that simply can't be made to lie, his face is as expressionless as a day-old calf. "I made a mistake and come down the wrong draw," he says, "and got the horse that had been left for Ted instead of my own."

"Humphf!" I snorts. "And after you found out you'd got his horse you went back and got that little gentle cub for him. That's a likely yarn."

All of a sudden a change comes over Bonehead. "I ain't told you all about myself yet, Cinders," he said, "and I'm askin' you not to push me for explanations. I'd been sick when I come to the Bar Cross, just got out of a hospital. That's why I had to be so careful about what I et, but I'm gettin' strong fast now. Why, I didn't hardly hurt at all last night after that Blue horse like to have jarred my insides loose. If you'll just not fire Ted and kind of not see his mistakes for a few days, I'll make it up to you, honest I will."

It was on my mind to insist that he tell me why he was so interested in a man that was a stranger to him, but just then a bunch of wild brush sneakers broke cover, and it was up to us to get 'em through a patch of quakies and across the ridge to the main herd before they could get back into the high country. It was fast work and hard ridin', with them wild cattle dodgin' through the timber, and the dead limbs crackin' us across our faces, and even if I hadn't already decided that The Bonehead was as nervy a rider as there was on the Bar Cross I would have before the next twenty minutes was over.

He was ridin' a big gray horse that we called Ranger, and he went through those trees most as quick as if the ground had been clear, jumpin' down timber one second, and layin' flat alongside his horse the next, to keep from bein' raked off by a leanin' tree. I'm a fairly good timber splitter myself, and we put them wild cattle into the open plenty quick, and then we outrun 'em, outdodged, and outfigured 'em, so that in a little while we was hazin' 'em across the ridge and down to where the main herd was bein' held.

It so happened that that bunch of steers had just the number in it by which our wagon finally won over the other two, so that all the boys but Case give Bony and me the credit for winnin' the bonus. Case couldn't see anything good in Bony and, if you'd ask me, I'd say that The Bonehead was glad of it.

Well, the night after we got back to the ranch, Mason handed me the hundred dollars to divide with my ounch, and right off Case wants to play poker. "Ten dollars ain't nuthin'," he claims. "I'd just as soon be broke. Let's all take ten dollars' worth of chips apiece and play freeze-out. Somebody'll have the hundred dollars when we get done, and the others won't be hurt any."

I was standin' where I could see The Bonehead, and his blue eyes was trained on Ted, watchin' to see what the boy would do. Of course, Ted must play. It appeared like he had learned just enough about the customs of the cow country to think that this was expected of him. I made an excuse that bein' foreman, I wasn't eligible, so the rest of 'em started in playin', five in the game. As fast as one man was froze out, another one took his place. Ted and Case was among the first five to sit in, and before they'd played very long we saw that Ted was playin' good, conservative poker. Twice, when Case, who is the best card shark on the Bar Cross, tried to bluff, Ted called him and showed down the winnin' hand. Bony kept hangin' back on one pretext or another till there was only four play-

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ers left at the table and he couldn't keep out of it any longer without the boys thinkin' he's a quitter. As he finally drags slowlike across toward the table and tosses his ten-dollar bill to the banker for his stacks of chips, I got a good square look at him, and sure as you're born The Bonehead was scared. I don't mean that he was afraid of losin' his money. He ain't that kind, and I've seen enough of his way of takin' chances on a slippery hillside to know that he's no coward, but I knew as I saw him straddle over that chair back and sit down at the poker table that The Bonehead saw a heap more to this than just a chance to lose ten dollars.

The ones still left to play for the chips that now represented the hundred dollars—me havin' refused to keep my ten out—was Case, Ted, Shorty, Pewee, and now The Bonehead is sittin' in the cold chair, that is, the others all havin' more money ahead of 'em than he has, they've got the advantage. That's the reason why in freeze-out the last man to come in is said to be sittin' in a cold chair.

It ain't a big enough game to cause much excitement. Some of the boys went to bed; others was fixin' their cinches gettin' ready for the work in the brandin' pens next day; but I couldn't have quit watchin' that game then, no matter what had happened. The players has all got their hats pulled down to keep the light out of their faces, that is, all but Ted. He's sittin' with his hat on the back of his head, a careless smile about his mouth, and his face a little flushed with the excitement. But I never saw him look so good, and as I saw that he had most of the chips, I could understand why Case's scowl was deepening with every deal. He had been fooled each time he'd set a trap to make Ted appear ridiculous, and his idea in startin' this game was simply because he thought he had a cinch to get that boy's share of the bonus money. He hadn't even thought of Ted beatin' him.

I never saw better poker played than those five men played that night, but it was plain that Shorty and Pewee were outclassed, and about ten o'clock first one and then the other dropped out; and in spite of the fact that Ted and Case are masters of the game, Bony is slowly, but surely, cuttin' 'em down. I can see that The Bonehead is under a nervous strain that is almost breakin' him. There's little beads that I can see on his left temple, which is toward me, and one time when somebody dropped a boot on the floor behind him he pretty near jumped over the table.

For the life of me I can't see what there is to be scared about. Then I got another surprise. Case opened a jack pot. Both the others stayed. The Bonehead, who is on Case's right, tilted the bet five dollars. Case instantly raised him back. Ted looked at his cards a long time, studied the play, and then tossed his cards into the discard. During those seconds before he decided to do that, The Bonehead's skin was white under the tan on his cheeks; but the instant Ted laughed and threw down his hand, it was like a cord that had been chokin' Bony had been suddenly cut. He laughed, the first time any of us had ever even heard him chuckle. Three minutes later, Case is froze out, and Bony leans back in his chair and pushes back his hat; Case slams his chair against the wall and goes out madder 'n a wet hen.

Bony looks up at me and says: "Has anybody got a drink?"

I got him a bottle, and he lowered it a-plenty. Him and Ted go to playin' plumb friendly and loose as ashes. In half a dozen deals Ted is broke, and so far as the others are concerned the whole thing is over; but I'm more anxious than ever. It's no use to tell me that this has been an ordinary poker game. I knew that there had been five minutes when the bony fingers of death

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had been stretched over that card table, and I made up my mind that before another day went by I'd know what was the meaning of all this mystery.

Why would a man be such a bonehead as to do another's work for him, risk his life on a bad horse, and then go into a poker game with death dealin' the cards, all for a man he had never seen until two weeks before? When Brooks called the boys to breakfast next mornin', Ted was gone. He hadn't called for his time, so Mason said; he'd just caught his own private horse that he'd rode in the day Mason hired him, and quit the Bar Cross without a word of explanation.

So far as I could see, The Bonehead paid no attention to his havin' gone, or to the discussions among the riders as to why he went. So again I was fooled into not demanding a show-down with Bony. If the present danger of a scrap between him and Case was past, it would be better not to let The Bonehead know that I'd seen more than I was supposed to see.

The difference in Bony was so great that the boys all wondered what had come over him. His face that had been so expressionless seemed to suddenly get just like his eyes. Nobody would have thought of callin' him a bonehead now, but a name generally sticks. The only man who didn't seem to see the change that had come over Bony was Case. He's either sore over the way he'd been cleaned at poker, or else he was just plain itchin' for a scrap. He was so evidently huntin a row that the boys avoided him, and this seemed to make Case proddier than ever. You could just see battle oozin' out of the way he walked, and when we went out to the big corral to start brandin' calves Case was wearin' a gun, something no man ever does around the ranch when they are goin' to work about the corrals. It was like Case had turned lone wolf and was declarin' to the world that he wasn't trustin' anybody, not even the men he had been workin' with every day.

I thought maybe it would quiet him if I showed him a little preference. Sometimes that'll make a rider snap out of a grouch, so when the irons was hot I sent Case in to take the first shift ropin'. Every man on the job was avoidin' him, excepting only The Bonehead. He surely wasn't afraid of him, not a bit; and I could hardly believe that Bony was the man who had been under such a nervous strain the night before. If ever a man thought he had a layout bluffed to a standstill, Case thought it that day, and he didn't put no string on his disposition. As Bony don't make no effort to keep out of his way, he gets the brunt of Case's ill-temper, but he'd have had to be a block-head not to see the tricks of Case slackin' a rope just as he is flankin', ridin' too close when he was sittin' down holdin' a calf, and a dozen other dirty little tricks that Case puts over.

But in the mind Bony's in to-day a man couldn't get nothin' out of him but a grin and a joke. By noon I saw there wasn't any use of foolin' with Case any longer. He'd just gone haywire and was so plainly lookin' for war that somebody 'd have to call him if he stayed on the Bar Cross. Men can't let a man ride over 'em and treat 'em like they was the scum of the earth right along without takin' it up, and I knew that as the men got tired and more or less touchy that somebody would just go to the house, get his gun, and come back and kill Case, or get killed, so I motioned to him as we left the chuck room to come to my little office. Of course, he knew what was coming, and when I handed him his check he didn't say anything but went right straight to his bunk and rolled his bed.

The rest of us went back to the corral to work, and I see The Bonehead look around over the bunch, and I knew he was wonderin' where Case was.

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"You can rope a while, Bony," I told him. "You took the worst of that deal this morning, and it seems to me that you're entitled to a little the best of it this afternoon."

He didn't make any reply, but saddled his top rope-horse and rode into the corral. He's as smooth as ropin' as he is at any other range work, and he hardly ever fails to loop a calf by both hind feet, which makes it easier for everybody. All the time, though, I can see that Bony is watchin' to see what's become of Case, and I fell to watchin', too, and wonderin' why he don't leave. Generally when a cowboy gets fired he can't get away quick enough to the nearest town to gamble his check or get drunk.

Case's private horse is down in the pasture, and I know that Case must be around the place somewhere, which means that he ain't give up yet, but intends to pick a row with somebody before he leaves the Bar Cross, and I'm pretty sure I know who that somebody will be.

The longer the shadows get from the spruce trees along the valley, the lower my spirits went, yet Case hadn't done anything that would give me an excuse for tellin' him he must go. During the late afternoon I went to the house on some pretext or other, and as I went by I peeked into the bunk house window. Case was sittin' there with his back to me. He had a quart beside him, and he was writin'. On the floor is a lot of bits of torn paper, as if Case had been havin' trouble to get a letter to suit him.

I went on to the house. Some way I'm suspicious that something is wrong there. All appeared to be quiet. I went through the kitchen to where Brooks was gettin' supper, and from there into the main living room, where Mason was sittin' by the fire, apparently unconscious. I went up to him and spoke to him. He raised up and looked at me so queer that I thought he'd had another spell with his heart like he does sometimes.

"What's the matter, boss?" I asked. "Are you sick?"

"Yes, Cinders," he says, "sick at heart, tired of life." He reached into his desk and pulled out a typewritten letter. "A Mexican just brought that," he says. "It's from my attorney in Denver. If I'd only got it yesterday before he left. I've hunted all over the world for that boy. I've never told you that I'd been married, but I was, and the woman who was my wife ran off with him when he was only a little kid."

"Some other man?" I inquired.

"Yes, a stranger she met at one of the Ski Hi Stampedes in Monte."

"What did he look like?" I asked.

Mason shook his head. "I never made any inquiries about the man. As long as she had left me, I didn't care. I always thought it was as much her fault as his, and I never bothered 'em. All I've been tryin' to do was to get the boy back."

I read the letter, and it said that the attorney had finally succeeded in communicating with Mason's son and had, after much trouble, prevailed on him to come to the Bar Cross; but that he had insisted on coming without letting anybody know who he was. He wanted to study his father and learn if the stories he'd heard about him were true. If he concluded that they were, he'd leave, and his father would never see him again.

"You see," said Mason, "he came up here and stayed till he had sized me up, and he didn't like me, so he left. He wouldn't even take my check for the money he'd earned ridin' at the Bar Cross."

I'm wonderin' more than ever if The Bonehead could possibly have known who Ted was, and I made up my mind to find out pronto. I went out to the corral and told one of the other boys to relieve Bony from ropin', and then I

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told The Bonehead to come to the office as soon as the other man took his place. I wasn't goin' to be in the dark any longer.

It was just gettin' sundown when Bony came in and swung himself graceful into an easy-chair. He looked more like a clean young range puncher than I'd ever seen him before—not a bit like the thin, hungry feller that I'd named for his bum looks. "There's two or three things I think I'd ought to know," I began, but Bony don't even hear what I'm sayin'. He has straightened up and is listenin' to the steady *thrump, thrump* of a horse's hoofs pounding on the hard road that comes up the lane from Monte.

We both had the same hunch, and jumped for the door just as Ted's horse slackened to a stop, and he lights on the ground before the horse is straightened up. If there had been a big change in The Bonehead since he'd been at the Bar Cross, there had been a heap bigger one in Ted. All that stiff, copy-book way of handlin' himself had dropped from him, and as he shakes his two low-hung guns into place, anybody could see by his actions that he was an experienced rider, and a fast gun slinger besides. He just stood there beside his panting horse, sort of getting his bearings; and, as if he'd made a appointment to meet him, Case came out of the bunk house. He ain't a bit pretty, either, Case ain't. His big, thick lips are swollen, and hate is writ all over his face. His eyes are bloodshot, and he's got two guns tied down. This ain't no time to interfere, and it's plain neither of 'em is carin' a snap about what happens to himself. The only thing he's interested in is to kill the other man.

Ted is the cooler one of the two. He don't throw his guns the way Case does, but holds 'em below his hips, which is the same as advertisin' that he intends to kill Case, even if he's shot to pieces himself; 'cause it's a fact that a man shootin' from this position can stand on his feet and kill another, even after he's got a fatal wound. It ain't possible for two such men as these to miss at that distance—less than a dozen yards—and it's too late for Bony and me to interfere. To try to stop this fight is as useless as it would be to try to quiet two fightin' range bulls. There'd 'a' been only one way, and that would have been for somebody to have roped 'em from behind and jerked 'em away from each other.

I saw the loose flannel of Ted's shirt raise as a .45 slug cut through it, and a second later a red splotch began to widen. He must have got to Case a second later, 'cause one of Case's arms hangs useless by his side, and right then I noticed that The Bonehead wasn't standin' by me any more, but had run around Ted and was makin' a dive for Case, like a football tackle runs, and, falling, hugs a man about the legs to throw him. If I hadn't named him The Bonehead long ago I sure would have when I saw him do that trick of runnin' square into the path of a hail of bullets and bulldogging the meanest one of the two fighters. He got him, too; and as Case flopped over onto the ground, Ted began to weave from one side to the other, and then took a couple of steps backward, and keeled over in my arms. I carried him into my room and laid him on the bed, and then rushed out into the yard. Bony had just taken Case's gun from his one good arm and batted him over the ear to make him lay still.

It's funny now, even then when I'd ought to have been thinkin' about Ted, my first thought was for Bony. "Are you hurt?" I yells at him.

"Not much," he says. "This crazy killer shot me through the leg after I grabbed him, and I had to knock him out to make him be good. Better find out how bad Ted is hurt."

Of course, by that time all the Bar

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Cross riders was there to help me with the wounded men. Two of 'em carried Case into the bunk house. He ain't hurt bad, except his left arm had caught one of Ted's slugs. Shorty rode to Monte for a doctor for Ted, who is unconscious. Mason sat by the fire, agony on his face. The doctor came and looked pretty sober after he'd looked at Ted, and said he'd have to be taken to Monte to the hospital. Bony's wound would be all right in a day or two. The doctor dressed it and put a bandage on it, and Bony didn't even go to bed, but he helped around, takin' care of the other two till the ambulance came for 'em, and they went away to Monte.

I was in Mason's room helpin' the old man to get ready to go to Monte as soon as the boys can get a team ready, when Bony came in. He looked different in the clothes he had on now, and there's a queer, quirky, little grin on his face, and his eyes was twinklin' like they had just seen the biggest kind of a joke, instead of a gun fight. Mason was standin' by the desk lookin' at Bony awful straight. His face was white, and there was a look in his eyes that asked a question that he couldn't put into words. All of a sudden there was a change came over Bony's face, and his eyes flooded with tears. He held out his arms to Mason and, without a word, they went to a clinch.

I just sat down good and hard and looked at 'em. Seein' 'em together, there ain't no doubt about Bony bein' Mason's boy. "Well," I snorts, "I've been fooled, and worried, and bamboozled till I think I'm entitled to know a few things."

"You're goin' to know it all now, you old grizzly," said Bony. "Case is the man who ran off with my mother. Ted is his son. He deserted Ted's mother when he stole mine. Seems like one of us had ought to 'a' killed him. Ted had heard he was in this country, and got a job of dad and, in order to throw everybody off, he acts a little green, not bad enough so as to appear useless, but just a little. At first he fooled me, and I did his work to keep him from losin' his job. It wasn't till yesterday that Ted told me his story because I'd been helpin' him. I'd been suspicious that Case was the man all the time, and last night I got a letter with his picture in it. Then I knew, and I thought what an awful thing it would be if them two was to have a run-in over that poker game, and the father was to kill his son, not even knowin' who he was. I didn't know that Ted was a gun slinger, too, till I saw him land all spraddled out beside his horse this evenin'. He had found out in Monte that Case was the man who had caused his mother so much suffering, and he came back here intendin' to shoot it out with him. Case evidently had it figured out too, 'cause he's been writin' all the afternoon, and he left a confession on the table when he came out to meet Ted."

"What made you look so plumb hopeless when you come here?" I asked.

"Well, naturally I hadn't heard the best side of my dad's disposition. I had been sick in a hospital. That's how that lawyer happened to find me. His daughter is a trained nurse. She'd heard the story and worked it out of me, who I was. I decided to just drift in here, ragged, and sort of desperate lookin', and see whether dad was as heartless as I'd always been told he was."

Mason sat down and looked at me, and for the first time for years there's an expression of contentment on his face. "Cinders," he says, "I don't believe I'll go to town like I intended. Send word to the hospital and tell 'em to give both them patients the best of care and send the bill to me. I'm willin' to go through all I've suffered to know I've got a son that will do what this boy did for a stranger."

"Even at that," I snorts, "I still insist it was a bonehead of a play."

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The Trail To Paradise

By Jackson Gregory

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

GARRY MONCTON, riding his cousin Steve's horse to his new ranch to meet Phil Kent, is shot at by Joe Miner, who tells him Steve is wanted for a killing at Westwood. Later, Garry is captured by Bob Ballinger, lumberman, and taken to the gambler, Jim Paradise. Ballinger loves Eve, Jim's daughter. Hearing Garry deny that he is the killer, her interest is aroused. Sheriff Brand arrives, takes Garry, but secretly aids him to escape. Garry finds Steve, shot, at the "Sun Dodger's" deserted cabin. Brand, following, acquits him of the crime. Garry ponders. Who has killed Steve? He reaches the ranch, but is met by Miner with the news that the house is boarded up. Phil's "Indian" danger signals are everywhere, but he never appears. Ballinger, furious with jealousy, tries vainly to oust Garry. The latter is set upon by three masked men, whom he disarms. Eve rides on the scene, recognizes Ballinger's men, and forbids them her house.

CHAPTER X.

ON ECHO PORCH.

THAT evening, such was the manner of Eve's invitation, Garry stayed to dinner. Afterward, they drew the radio close to a window and went out on the porch overhanging the abyss. The night was softly glorious, a quartered moon lending radiance and yet not dimming the big splendid stars shining out above the mountain tops. Eve tuned in to a favoite station; distant, languorous violins breathed upon them like a muted fairy orchestra. The air was sweet and cool and fresh in their faces, only faintly and elusively spicy with whiffs of incense from pine and cedar commingling their fragrances. Through the open door extended a clear-cut path of light ending like a broken bridge at the porch rail.

Garry and Eve sat on two chairs drawn up close to the rail; at the far

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end of the porch where the red light of a cigar end appeared and vanished at intervals, Jim Paradise stretched his tall form on a bench. The little quiet man, Tootles, puffed a pipe and listened when anything was said; was appreciatively aware of the violins; and had not a single observation to make.

Garry leaned back in his chair, balancing it on two legs; thus he could watch the clear profile of the girl at his side. Eve's profile against the stars! A Blessed Damozel leaning out from this aërial paradise.

After a while, Tootles rose and left them. Garry idly watched him go his silent way; he could fancy that the steadily puffing pipe was some weird mechanism like a little engine, drawing the unresistant man along after it. The music ended in a fading mist of sound. Eve went to hush the radio before the announcer's voice, attuned to San Francisco's tempo, could militate against the still harmony here. Paradise made a long red glow of his cigar, then he spoke.

"About your little adventure of this afternoon, Moncton."

Nothing had been said of it at table. There had been nothing to hint at Paradise knowing anything of it.

"Eve told me," continued the gambler's voice in a quiet monotone; without seeing his face, one knew it was serene. "I'm glad you handled the situation. I'd like to have seen it; next best, you know, to being in on it."

Garry, with his hands clasped behind his head, gave over trying to make out the gambler's face. It was so much easier, after all, to turn his eyes back upon the gambler's daughter; so much easier to let them rest on her still face.

"Eve told me, too, what she added to the comedy; her own words to the three," continued the placid voice. "Quite natural; one speaks hastily when moved." Garry wondered swiftly if Paradise would; further, if Paradise would allow himself to be moved in the first place! "But you will understand, I think, how back here in the hills we are in the habit of expecting every man to kill his own rats. So long as each of two men has his two legs, two hands, and, we'll say, one good rifle eye, they're free to settle their disputes in their own way."

"Jimmie!" expostulated Eve. "And besides, it wasn't man to man. Three to one, remember!"

Paradise's voice continued unchanged, unless even a trifle more deliberate.

"Every man makes his own enemies. They're not, because of that, my enemies. Nor yours, my dear. You have told Sandy and Dan and Curly not to come again, and so they'll stay away. But I am sending word to them to-night that the excommunication is at an end and all goes on as usual."

Garry, seeing Eve stir restlessly, spoke up quickly.

"Fair enough, Mr. Paradise. I deeply appreciated your daughter's friendly interest. I appreciate no less your frankness. And I have no thought, I assure you," he said fervently, "of embroiling you or yours in any trouble which may come my way."

"Fine!" said Paradise and stood up. A moment his tall form was outlined as he stood at the rail, looking down into the canyon. Then he went to the door, saying casually: "The boys will be drifting along pretty soon. Care to take a hand to-night, Moncton?"

There was just enough light, so close did Eve sit to him, for Garry to see her eyes, softly mysterious.

"No, thanks," he answered. "If Miss Paradise allows it, I will sit here with her until she is ready to go inside. Then I'll be on my way."

Out of a long silence Eve spoke. "You'll think we are savages up here," she said listlessly.

"No," Garry told her heartily. "Each man to his own code, say I! Your father

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has his; he makes clear where he stands; all honor to him."

"Jimmie's odd, I guess," she sighed, as a young mother over a boy who gave her moments of concern. "He doesn't like Bob Ballinger; he does like you. He is sure that this afternoon's trouble came direct from Bob, and yet he refuses to let it affect him. And, you know, his attitude toward the conflicts of other men is one that seems to be rather bred in the bone here with us. You know Judd Jenkins?"

"The protector, so to speak, of 'Jenkins' Widow'?" Garry chuckled. "Not personally; I've met his friend Adams, though."

"Judd Jenkins," said Eve reminiscently, "was for years quarreling with his neighbor Ferguson. One day it came to shooting, and Judd killed Ferguson. There was no secret made of it. Word went to town; Mr. Brand rode out to see about it. He passed the time of day with Judd, chatted about weather and crops, and then got around to what brought him. 'It was a fair fight, sheriff,' Jenkins told him. 'He tried to git me; I got him first.' Mr. Brand heard him through, then said: 'Better ride along with me to the courthouse, Judd; there are always certain formalities, you know.' Judd, with his old rifle across his arm, rode into town. He visited with the sheriff, the tax collector, and the treasurer, all men he knew; he and the judge talked things over; then he got himself some tobacco, and a side of bacon, and a few odds and ends, and rode along home. They all knew no jury in this county would find him guilty. And, do you know, in Judd Jenkins' heart for a long time there was a strange loneliness; an emptiness. For he and Ferguson had for a long time meant so much to each other."

"Then he found Old Man Adams! And lo! the wound was healed!"

"Why do men have to fight so? Like beasts!"

"Do you see those two stars yonder, close together? Twinkling, laughing stars. Know the old Spanish California name for them? *Los ojitos de Santa Lucia.* 'The little eyes of Santa Lucia.' But you asked a rhetorical question, didn't you? Where is the wise man to answer. Sometimes, I've heard told, the very thing which does make them fight like beasts is the thing which raises them above beasthood. A pair of pretty eyes, Eve Paradise, and not so far away as those less pretty ones of Santa Lucia!"

"That letter—or whatever it is in the envelope you gave me to keep for you?" said Eve abruptly. "You haven't forgotten it? You want me to keep it still?"

"Will you? Some time I'll tell you what's in it. I am tempted to to-night! No; I'll wait."

"All I'd have to do, you know," she laughed, mercurially swinging from wistfulness to her characteristic bubbling happiness, "would be just to peek in it. It's not sealed, you remember."

"But you wouldn't," said Garry lightly.

"Of course I wouldn't! But how should you know?"

"If I hadn't known just exactly that, that memorandum of mine would have had to go unwritten."

With the arrival of the first of the customary Saturday night guests, Garry rose to go.

"Good night, Eve Paradise. I ride on my way still steeped in the magic of a perfect evening."

She stood up with him. As he took her hand she asked a hint anxiously:

"Do you think you will be molested on your way home?"

"I ride with a borrowed rifle, until I can pick up my own," he said lightly. "No, I don't expect to run into any more adventures to-night. Somehow, it's altogether too fine an afterglow to be spoiled that way."

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"If you like, I'll say good night to Jimmie for you, and show you out through the hall. You needn't go through the main room unless you care to."

She showed him the way down the long, dimly lighted hallway which ran the length of the building. Voices grew louder as they passed a door; Eve stopped a moment, a look of surprise on her face.

"Bob is in there," she said curiously. "It's the first time I can remember that he has come without sending us his shout ahead of him from down in the canyon."

When they came to the rear door and Garry stood, bare-headed, looking down at her, Eve's head was tipped back, her eyes fixed on that glorious old field of glory, the sky sprinkled with stars. A falling star, come from nowhere, flashed and vanished, extinguished in mystery. She stirred and sighed faintly; a little icy shiver of foreboding shook her. A shooting star, a human lifetime.

"I am afraid," she whispered. And when he, misunderstanding her, began to speak, she said hurriedly: "No; not for myself! Good night!"

She withdrew into the shadowy door; he, too, thought of a star sped across the sky, hiding itself.

"Good night, Eve."

"Good night—Garry."

He heard her high heels clicking and strode off for his horse. He did not hear her tiptoes when she came to watch him ride away. When he had gone, and she had heard Dandy's hoofbeats against a granite trail die away into silence, she went thoughtfully back along the dim hallway and out upon the porch which, while remaining her same dear familiar haunt, was subtly changed for her. She went softly to the furthermost eastern end; that was nearest Echo Canyon. After a while she heard hoofbeats again, faint with distance, dying imperceptibly into the hushed silence. She strained her ears. No further sound; no shout or outcry—or ominous rifle shot.

"Life, you are so mysterious! You are like a new trail through strange mountains and wildernesses. One can guess so little what is next; a bend in the trail and—what?"

A voice grew loud in the main room and she turned slowly. That was Bob Ballinger speaking. Ballinger who had broken a long custom in not shouting to them—to her, if she cared to be honest with herself; who now spoke with some new strange note in his voice. The words did not matter, some triviality. It was the tone. Harsh? More than that. Savage? No, though savagery was in it. Bitter? Yes, and reckless, and truculent.

She opened the door and entered. A clamor greeted her, men rising swiftly. She sought and found instantly Ballinger's massive form. He, too, rose; yet he did not spring up like the others. He came to his feet slowly and stood, solidly planted. When others came forward in a playful rush to be first to shake hands with her, Ballinger bided his time. Her eyes had not lingered on his face; she had seen that it was grave and set in immobile lines; then she looked elsewhere. He, for his part, did not shift his eyes from her face.

And so, when at last he came forward and got her two hands in both of his, he had her to himself through the reverse of his customary expedient; instead of shouldering ahead, he waited. It was something new in him, and she sensed still other new things and flashed him a swift look of interrogation. What she saw did not make for her happiness. Ballinger, a moderate man in liquor, had somewhat departed to-night from moderation. There she had one, if the minor, explanation of that light in his eyes. She saw too, knowing the man so well and being alert to observe, that some chained fury raged in his breast

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mute as yet, but unmuzzled. Physically she felt the power of the man; his hands were locked about hers; his had been a swiftly arrested impulse to draw her close, close to him; she felt the jerk of muscles suddenly molded into rigidity. And for a brief breathless instant she was afraid of him. Afraid that he was going to kill her.

Absurd! He had let her go; the color came rushing back into her momentarily blanched cheeks; she summoned her light laughter to conceal her strange agitation.

"Moncton gone, Eve?" called Paradise carelessly, yet keen-eyed for any play of expression on Ballinger's face.

Eve pretended she had not heard. Why was Jimmie so bent on doing anything, saying anything, he could hit on to plague Bob Ballinger? As for Ballinger, there was nothing written on his face to show if he heard or cared.

"Can I have three minutes alone with you, Eve?" he asked bluntly.

"Why, of course!" She strove for the light touch. She, too, wanted that short talk alone. She, too, had her question to ask. For she was altogether too fair-minded toward all men to judge any one of them without hearing him. "Let's go out on the porch."

He followed her and closed the door after him. She was waiting for him beside the rail. He came close to her, towering over her and for a while did not speak. She could see how his hands were rigid on the rail.

"What is it, Bob? What are you thinking?"

"Thinking?" He ran a hand over his brow; his voice sounded strained. "The truth?"

"Of course. The truth always."

"I was thinking that I'd like to take you in my arms; to hold you tight; to jump with you down yonder."

"Bob!"

"No, I'm not crazy. If I can't have you, I'd rather be dead. Rather have you dead, too, along with me than have you belong to any other man."

She wanted to draw back from the rail; she wanted to run. And she was afraid to stir. The man's voice was so hushed, so firm, so profoundly thoughtful. Her vision a little while ago of a shooting star flashed back through her mind, as vivid now in retrospect as it had been in actuality. Did one, after all, have premonitions which after-happenings realized? Jimmie said so; Jimmie, the gambler, with all his superstitions.

Ballinger at last took a long, deep breath; the spell of the moment was broken. Her fear departed and became unreasonable. She dropped down into one of the chairs. Ballinger remained standing, looking not at her but out into the night.

"Well?" said Eve after a long silence.

"I have given Moncton fair warning," he said slowly. "I am going to drive him out of the mountains or kill him—or he'll have to kill me."

"Why are you like this, Bob? There is no reason——"

"There is every reason. You are the reason, and you are everything. I shut my eyes and imagine there is no you; what happens then? There is no me either. Can't you see——"

"I see," she said earnestly, a note of pleading in her voice even before the plea could be expressed, "that you are not quite yourself, Bob; not quite my old friend, Bob Ballinger. You are letting yourself go, aren't you? Down the wrong road?"

"I'm not drunk, if that's what you mean. Letting myself go? Yes. I'll go the whole road, too. Moncton is a yellow coward; he's no man's man, and no woman's. He's the same blood as the Westwood killer. How do I know? I can tell by looking at him! And he looks at you! He——"

"Why should we discuss Mr. Moncton? He is not what you say of him.

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I saw to-day when three of your men, carrying rifles, attacked him!"

"A cornered rat will fight," said Ballinger, and now his voice sharpened. He fell silent, and then spoke in measured words: "He stayed here all afternoon? You invited him to supper? He left only just now?"

"Yes," she told him quietly, though she did not like to be questioned as he questioned her, and it was only with an effort that she answered him without display of resentment.

"I won't stand it!" said Ballinger. "Understand, Eve? I won't stand it!"

"Bob——" she began, still determined to keep to the even path. But she forgot what it was that she had been about to say, as at last her question would be no longer denied: "Was it at your orders that Curly, and Dan, and Sandy, attacked him?"

"What do you think?" demanded Ballinger.

"I don't know what to think; I don't want to think that it was."

"Does it make any difference," he said, bending close to look into her face, "how a man gets rid of snakes?"

She rose suddenly, staring at him incredulously.

"You did that thing! I wouldn't believe it. You sent hirelings to fight a man who—a man—— Why, Bob Ballinger, it is you who are the coward!"

She stepped back, away from him. He drew close; she sprang out of his reach toward the door.

"Listen, Eve——"

"Don't touch me!"

"No. No, I'll not touch you now. But listen to me——"

"There is only one thing I would hear from you now," she cried hotly. "That you did not do a thing like that. And it seems that you cannot bring yourself to lie about it! Why stop at a lie, Bob, and be that kind of a coward?"

"You have slapped me," he said thickly. "You have struck me in the face. You, my Eve, that I love. My Eve that loved me, or was about to love me. You slap me in the face. You!"

She could only look at him wonderingly; he mumbled it over and over as though actually she had struck him a physical blow.

"You call me a coward. You are done with me, and you say it that way. I did send those men; yes. They are miserable little curs; I should have done the work myself. But it wasn't that I was afraid, Eve. Me, afraid of any man that gets between you and me?" He shook his head. She could feel what was going on within him; feel it as one does a sultry, ominous something in the air when Nature is on the verge of catastrophe; as when a tidal wave is coming, as when thunder gathers. "I was going to attend to him. Something kept me away. Something so important that I could not come. That is, I thought it was going to happen."

He grew sullen, surly; his words dwindled away into a dull muttering.

"You are drunk!" she cried accusingly.

"Maybe." He turned toward the room they had just quitted. He went in without a backward look and closed the door softly, shutting her out. She stood listening. On Ballinger's entrance the room grew strangely hushed. Not an eye but was on his face, stern, and rugged, and white. He looked neither to right nor left but went straight through the room and out at the farther door. He stopped there for his hat and the rifle he had left standing against the wall, took them up and went out.

CHAPTER XI.

THEY'RE GANGING UP.

THOUGH he would have been first in scornful repudiation of such a statement, Joe Miner was as happy as a lark. For while Garry prolonged his afternoon absence until long after night-

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fall, Joe had been visited by an inspiration and had been as busy as a beaver which, by the way, he somewhat resembled in the matter of his activities. It all had to do with that merry rivulet which let itself in at the rear of the house and went gurgling across the dirt floor of the kitchen. Its excuse for being here at all lay in its chuckling companionship; it was hard to regard it and not judge that the facility offered to scoop up a pan of water for the nearby stove was aught else than a fortunate by-product. Joe, when he got his inspiration, saw a chance for nobler accomplishment.

He went to work with a will, pick and shovel, wielded to the accompaniment of Joe's voice in various ballads which belong to another generation. What was at the beginning a narrow trench became under his ministrations a stream of size. Where the mere dimple of a place had invited dipper, Joe now proceeded to dig out a wide, deep pool.

"Come on, you trout fishes!" he invited before the muddied waters had a chance to start running clear. "Here's your home!"

And when Garry returned Joe led him kitchenward in pride.

"There's an old gag," said Joe, "that a man's house is his castle. I got to thinking of that there fact, Mr. Moncton, these being days when conditions remind a reading man somewhat of the days of old when boots were free, so to speak. A man ought to have it so, come a siege and beleaguerment, he could pull up his portico and sit snug. I've bored a couple of holes in the back wall; through them a man can watch so's to make sure his source of water ain't monkeyed with; through them, same time, he can drill the daylights out o' them that dares."

He held up his candle for Garry to see. A great pile of freshly shoveled dirt stood in the middle of the floor; that, said Joe, he'd pitch out the first thing by daylight. Garry saw the pool, clear now, and the boards brought from the barn which Joe had laid across them. Further, he saw the willow pole made into a fishing rod, and heard Joe's elucidations:

"You sit there on that chair. You drop a hook in that hole. You flop your Mr. Trout out so he falls on the table next the butcher knife. You clean him, dump what you don't want of him back in the brook, and it goes marching on; you flip what you do want into the fry pan. And there you are, Mr. Moncton!"

Garry laughed at him.

"I like to see a man make himself at home," he said. Then he added: "This idea of standing siege may come in handy at that! I had a nice little run-in with three of Ballinger's men this afternoon; it was their decided opinion that this would be a sweeter, cleaner land if I threw my shadow across some other one."

"Didn't ask about me, did they?" said Joe sharply.

"Never a word."

"That, being the best part of your story, you ought to have told it first! Now here's another nice thing about my contraption: Like I said the other day, I like to keep my gun handy at the same time I have a door open somewhere so I can go in a hurry if I want to go. In a man's castle he ought to keep that sort of strategem in mind; so, Mr. Moncton, kindly cast an eye at this little river. It's big enough now so a man can lay down in it and wiggle along and sneak out clean under the house, coming out at either end, while the vandals, we'll say, hammer at the gates! How's that?"

"Fine," Garry assured him and yawned. "Don't you plan on sleeping to-night?"

"Sure, I do. Got to tell you the news first. Who do you think I saw this afternoon? Abe Vickery, that's who! Ha, surprised you, didn't I?"

"I never was more surprised in hear-

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ing something of a man I'd never even heard of before! Who's Vickery?"

"He's a slider," said Joe, and registered disgust. "A slider," he went on to explain, "is my own make of a word for gents like Abe Vickery. A slider is a man who having gone just as far up along the road of life, Mr. Moncton, as it is in him to go, stops there and sort of teeters a spell and then starts the other way. He slips, and he slides, and he's fast on his way to what you might call the boglands of worthlessness. That's Abe Vickery."

Garry nodded that he understood. Having other and, as he supposed, more important matters on his mind, he turned away when Joe snatched him back with a clutch at his arm.

"There was something funny about Abe Vickery showing up here," he said, doing his rather competent best to get mystery into both voice and look. "Strange doings, I'd say, Garry."

"Shoot," said Garry. "I can see you're loaded."

"If you see a stranger with black whiskers that at first you mistake for a weasel," said Joe, "that's Vickery. Skin like it was rolled out of bread dough; eyes like you'd stuck shoe buttons in it. Used to be a pill slinger before he joined the sliders. Time was, and I remember it, that when folks was took sick it was a fifty-fifty break whether they'd send for Hatfield or Vickery. Just a bum now.

"All right. And what does this bum do? He drives a pack mule all loaded to the ears up to our doorstep, and he says is Mr. Kent in. And I says no he ain't. And he says he'd like to get permission from the boss here to camp on the far end of the ranch. And Joe Miner, getting interested, leads him on with banter and repartee. Led on, Abe Vickery says how he's got the con; and he coughs hollow as any tomb to prove it. That's lie number one. Number two is that he's just blew in for his lung's sake, arriving this same morning from the valley lands. As if I didn't know the lying game as good as any!"

"What makes you think he lied?"

"Do I look like a man that thinks? I know! It's more'n two weeks now since, sneaking off through the brush to avoid the advances of Jenkins' Widow which I hopes he keeps his own, I glimpses this same Abe Vickery nosing about! And that wasn't more two-three mile from here, sort of betwixt your place and mine! He was hiding, too, or I'll eat your boot. And now he comes pretending that he's just arriving!"

Garry stood frowning at the boot to which Joe so glibly referred.

"And," stressed Joe, "who in this country ever heard of a man asking if he could camp? That bird was snooping, Mr. Moncton. Just take it from me."

"What on earth can he want here?"

"He's a snooper by nature, likewise by profession," said Joe stoutly. "He's next door to being what Slyke, the shyster, is, and you know him. By gravy!" Joe gave his leg a mighty slap. "Come to think of it, the two, Vickery and Slyke, are cronies! There's something up, Mr. Moncton. There's—— Wait a shake! Out of my own mouth I said it," and Joe's eyes widened and filled to a deep gravity in which concern was evident. Vickery and Slyke. Slyke and Ballinger. Vickery and Ballinger! And I let Vickery see me!"

"And now your happiness is all gone," grunted Garry.

"Happiness? I wasn't happy. If you heard me a-singing, it was just to keep my spirits up. For I knew something was going to happen to spoil things."

"What about Slyke and Ballinger?"

"Everybody knows there's some deal on between the two of 'em. What it is, there's no guessing. But for two-three months Ballinger has been going

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into town once in so often, holing up with Slyke."

"Something to do with his options, no doubt. A man doing as big business as Ballinger seems to have on his hands always requires a lawyer."

"But why Slyke?" snorted Joe. "Why not a real lawyer instead of a snake? There are what you might call wheels within wheels, Mr. Moncton. Ballinger hates Brand. Why? Brand returns the feeling. All right. Slyke hates everybody. Ballinger teams up with him. Now with Vickery. And——"

"Good night, Joe," cut in Garry and went off to his room. "Sweet dreams."

"Sweet nightmares!" muttered Joe.

The next day Garry rode early, and though he made no confession of his intention to a cheerily perturbed breakfast companion, he went seeking the newcomer, Vickery. And found him with little trouble, led to the spot by the smoke of a camp fire.

The man, readily recognized from Joe's description, had made a camp within what Garry called the city limits of Michigan City. A small tent stood in a small grove which had sprung up during the last fifty years or so in the one street; Vickery himself, unkempt, and untidy, and pasty-skinned, poked at his fire and hovered over a coffeepot. When he saw Garry he coughed.

"That's a lie, and Joe's right," Garry promptly decided.

"Mr. Moncton?" asked Vickery, and then began pouring out the same tale he had told Joe.

"That's all right," Garry told him shortly. "Make yourself at home so long as you're careful with your fire. You seem to be. If there's anything I can do for you, let me know," and he rode on.

Was Joe, right in one thing, right in others? Was there something which connected Ballinger with this furtive individual? Ballinger himself was, thought Garry, so obvious, so forthright that this made a strange playfellow for him.

Garry rode on that day to Miller's Flats, a small mountain settlement half a dozen miles farther on where there was a grocery store of sorts, and as an adjunct, a post office. The stage came and went twice a week, and Garry sent a letter, to be carried out to-morrow, to Brand. It said merely that a man named Abe Vickery was here; that he might or might not have business with Ballinger. If not interested the sheriff could pitch the letter in his wastebasket and forget that it had ever been written.

But Brand did nothing of the sort. He got Garry's letter one early afternoon; that night, his son with him, he arrived late at the Mountain Meadow ranch.

"So Ballinger's got you yelling for help already, has he?" was Brand's none too affable greeting.

Garry stared at him.

"Say it again, sheriff," he retorted.

Brand, he thought, looked worn and weary; for the first time this man who usually showed a countenance about as mobile as granite, evinced a very human querulousness.

"Oh, I'm snappy, if you like," Brand grunted back at him. "And, to get started right, I could do with a drink," he added irritably.

Joe Miner slipped away and returned with a jug. Brand drank from a tin cup, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, made himself a cigarette, and stared steadily at Garry.

"Now, then, for a fresh start, since my first didn't make any hit with you. I got your letter; that's why I'm here. Just what's the trouble?"

Garry shrugged. He had meant to give the sheriff a bit of information, which as he had made clear in his note, might be of interest or of none.

"Dad's had a hard day," spoke up Tom Brand swiftly. "I never knew a man, Mr. Moncton, that packed as much

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misery on one pair of shoulders and gave as little sign of it."

Brand only laughed. "Come, Moncton, let's go: A man named Abe Vickery shows up and you deduct something. Suppose you forget my dig about you being scared of Ballinger and tell us what's on your mind?"

"Fair enough. From one place and another, largely from Joe Miner here, I gather that there's no great love lost between you and Ballinger. Add to that, that recently Ballinger and Slyke have become thick as thieves. Next, that there's something on between Slyke and Vickery. Conclusion, Vickery shows up here, on my land, and, therefore, within easy distance of Ballinger. That's about all."

"A combine, huh?" Those three gents framing something?"

"I don't know what they could be framing. I do know that somebody shot my cousin. It might have been Ballinger. Since Joe Miner swears that Vickery lied about just arriving, and has been up here some weeks, it might even be Vickery. I know, too, that something has happened to Phil Kent and that——"

"No more sign messages?" demanded Brand. "No more broken sticks?"

"No. And I've kept an eye open here at the house and on all my rides."

"And," spoke up Joe, looking crafty, "don't forget the other gent. There's the old Sun Dodger."

"What do you know about him, Joe?" asked Brand, eying him keenly. "I suppose you'll speak up like the rest and confess that you've never even seen him?"

"I've seen him once," said Joe. "Leastways, I'm stringing my bets that a way."

Brand looked at him in a way which was as good as saying that he wondered if Joe was to be believed or was just plain lying.

"What I glimmed through the brush once," said Joe, argumentative of expression as he met the sheriff's eye, "was a white-whiskered old coot squatting alongside something he was fussing with on the ground. It was down by the crick, twixt here and his place. I guess he heard me coming along, seeing how he upped and vamosed. Now you see him, now you don't; click; just like that."

"That's about what most folks ever have to tell me," laughed Brand and leaned back, beginning to relax on his rawhide-bottomed chair.

"I guess," said Tom, eying his hero enviously, "that you're about the only man that ever did run him to earth for a powwow!"

"Never mind that. Fire ahead, Joe! You're not dragging the Sun Dodger in by the tail just to tell us you saw him go scooting through the brush once. What's on your mind?"

"Gold," said Joe. "The one thing that explains most to-do's, I reckon. Gold, sheriff."

"Gold!" scoffed Brand. "I ask what's on your mind, and you say 'Gold.' And I might 'a' known it. If you ever had anything else turning over inside that overgrown lemon you call a head, I don't know what. Always dreaming gold; always prospecting; always finding that the real place to go look is just over the next ridge."

"Well, I ain't the only one, am I? How about this here Sun Dodger? That's his game, ain't it?"

"Get on with it, Joe, can't you?" put in Garry impatiently. "What are you driving at?"

"I'll string you some ifs," said Joe placidly. "If the Sun Dodger, that everybody knows is looking for gold, found it; and mind you all, he might, seeing we're not far from Michigan City where it has been turned up once in fair bunches—if that gold was right here on this same Mountain Meadow ranch—if the Sun Dodger was afraid

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Phil Kent was getting wise to it—then, what might he do?"

"Maybe you're not as big a fool as you look, Joe," said Brand with a grin, while young Tom listened with all his might, eyes round. "Any more?"

"Some more ifs," returned Joe equably. "If he knew the real owner here was Moncton; if he knew Moncton was headed this way; if he took Steve Moncton for the Moncton in question—then what?"

Garry had been listening intently; he now shifted forward a little in his chair.

"Ballinger offered me a ten-thousand-dollar bonus," he said, thinking aloud, "to let him have the ranch. And I ran across him at old Michigan City."

"All right, boys," said Brand with one of his heavy shrugs. "Have it all your way: The country's grease-rich with gold; Ballinger and the Sun Dodger, and Slyke, and Vickery, are all in on the know. Interesting if true, as they say. Only I'm telling you this: I've done real prospecting in my days; not skimming the way Joe goes at it, either. That was in Alaska. I went up there before Tommy here was born, and I was long enough at it for Tommy to grow up into a pretty husky lad. That's not saying that I know all that is to be known about gold; but it gives me a chance to open my mouth in this distinguished company. And I'll tell you that you birds can prospect until your fingers drop off and all the gold you'll ever dig in this country will come up, minted, out of some other jasper's pocket. Trousers pocket, I mean. And now I'm off to bed; and if Moncton hasn't got a spare bed I'm for the floor."

Joe took up a candle and escorted him off to bed. Tom Brand looked after the stalwart departing figure with the two heavy revolvers banging at the hips, and the pride in his boyish regard was somewhat dimmed by a look of concern.

"They've got him worried, Mr. Moncton," said the boy impulsively, and laid a hand on Garry's arm as on that of a friend. "I don't know what it's all about, but I reckon dad does. It's that Slyke, always prying and sneaking; him, and Ballinger that would give his right arm to do dad harm. Now with Vickery teamed in, what do you suppose?"

"Don't you do any worrying, kid," Garry laughed at him. "If there's any man among us who knows how to look out for himself it's your old man."

"He's under some kind of a strain, I tell you——"

"Leave it to him. Leave it to time to show us what it is."

"It's this combination. It's the Sun Dodger, dang him, most of all!" young Brand burst out. "Oh, dad would knock my block off for talking like this. But I can't help it. I feel it in my bones. That crazy coot, the Sun Dodger, is out after dad's scalp. And one of these days—or dark nights rather—I'm afraid for dad," he ended bleakly.

"You're imagining most of this, aren't you?" asked Garry gently.

"I'm imagining it all! And that's what makes it all the worse. Your cousin's murdered first; next Phil Kent, for if he wasn't, he'd have turned up, wouldn't he? Or you'd have had word from him, wouldn't you? And now, you're going to see, dad's next—unless we can somehow get the swing of it all and stop 'em."

"Look here, kid——"

"Oh, I'm no kid! I'm not going around crying like a baby. I've never shot off my mouth like this before, and I'll never do it again. It's just got my goat right now, that's all. Ballinger's got it in for the old man; I've seen murder in his eyes when he looked at him. And now with the crowd ganging up, Ballinger, and Slyke, and Vickery—all rats—and the Sun Dodger——"

He had sunk his voice to a whisper, afraid that his father might hear; there was an agony of fear in his eyes.

"I told you," he muttered, an apology

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of a sort, "because I know you're square. And you're mixed up in it and are right here on the ground. That's why."

"Good," said Garry heartily, finding that he liked the boy. "And I'm glad you did. And now, how about sleep? There's another day coming, you know."

CHAPTER XII.

THE WHIP HAND.

WITH Ballinger it was down Eros, up Mars. When he stalked out of Paradise House it was like one driven by the angel of the flaming sword into the outer darkness. Even his own men, those who knew him best and had known him longest, did not know how to take him. Which was not strange, after all, in that, while the same, it was a new Ballinger who came back into the lumber camp.

He—who had ever been outspoken, quick in rough play, a companion of the boisterous, was become in an hour a somber man who brooded. He became taciturn; when he spoke it was in a rasping voice and with an evil flash of the eyes. Clear eyes always, bloodshot now. He sat alone and drank deep; the stuff which he drank, the first to come to hand, was liquid fire. Drunk, he fell to muttering. He slept in his clothes, sodden, like a log. He awoke surly, and with the day waxed more and more sullen. With work to do, he did it. He labored through a tremendous day, and he drove other men to work as he did. Eyes followed him at every step, wondering eyes, but they were quick to shift to avoid a meeting with his own.

Not that his crew of timberjacks were the men to stand for high-handed dictation; not that they were of the stuff to go in fear of any man. It was only at first that a new condition came into being, so swiftly and so utterly unheralded that they were unready for it. So they gave him a wide path and were watchful and something more than curious.

News has its own way of traveling. What happens in one corner of the wilderness is blown on the wind of gossip across miles of solitudes. Men when they met anywhere by chance stopped long enough for a word and a smoke together. Thus was noised about that meeting between Garry Moncton and Ballinger when Garry had menaced the timber man with a quirt, and had ridden on without striking. It was the sort of tale to stimulate speculation and, in the end, to stir up laughter.

Then, too, there was much comment on quite another affair, yet one which involved Bob Ballinger no less: that of Jenkins' Widow and Ballinger's photograph. Louder laughter here, so rich with absurd possibilities was the situation. And finally, a third matter enjoyed its hour of holding a high place in interest: the meeting of three of Ballinger's men with the same newcomer, Garry Moncton. Those three most concerned had little to say and, quite naturally, drew no inspiration for mirth from such accounts as went up and down. Gargantuan laughter, however, for those who told of it.

Wisps of gossip were borne in due course to Ballinger's ears. They were so many goads in his flesh.

Word of the thing which Bob Ballinger had become, accounts of the various manifestations of black fury, came to Paradise House and saddened and perplexed Eve Paradise; they reached the Mountain Meadow ranch and made Garry more keenly watchful; they fell upon Joe Miner's ears, said that worthy, like bullets and put fresh fear of death into him. For Ballinger had fallen into the habit of muttering, and his mutters boded no good to any man whose name dropped from his lips. He named Garry Moncton the treacherous murderer of his own cousin, and swore that he should not long dwell in these mountains; he named Brand a crook who shielded the Sun Dodger, another murderous dog;

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he named Joe Miner a fool who was due to have the spark of life all but beaten out of him when soon or later he fell into Ballinger's hands.

He had even a word for Eve Paradise, and he spoke it sneeringly when drunk, not with liquor alone. He laughed at himself for having been for a spell weakling enough to go fussing around for any woman, and sweepingly condemned the entire sex as parasites and poison in the blood of strong men. Love her? His own laughter was uglier than all that other coarse mirth which went up here and there at his expense. The world was full of women, and one was as good as another. And he was done with Eve Paradise.

But that had all been said during the first few hours of his inner rebellion. Later, he grew silent upon Eve Paradise; still later, scowling, he announced that he had wanted her once and might want her again.

Few men could have stood up under the punishment this man was giving himself, handing his body over to strong drink, his soul to stronger powers. Yet Ballinger, red-eyed and sullen, lost never a daylight hour from his work. He established two new camps and they began to resemble the two jaws of great iron pincers about to close upon the Mountain Meadow. For both were on the boundaries of Garry's ranch, one near the ghost town, the other where Garry had come upon his timber cruiser, on the south boundary line. And, even before in readiness, Ballinger began falling timber.

That persecution, or a determined move to precipitate violence was the intent, Garry clearly understood. That violence would be the ultimate outcome seemed likely enough. But what he did not understand was Slyke's close adherence to Ballinger's camp. For, no matter what else the man might be, he remained a lawyer. And Garry cared little for the entanglements of litigation.

He spoke to Brand, and Brand, grown irritable here of late, shrugged at him.

"It's none of my affair what you two fools do," he said shortly, "until after you do it! Then, if you happen to be the one left on deck, watch my smoke!"

Garry saw trees fall that he believed to be his trees. And yet, though he grew restive, he strove with himself for cool consideration. He asked Joe Miner, and Joe pointed out the approximate lines as he thought that they existed. Thinking, however, was not proof. Doubtless, Phil Kent had checked up on all corners, yet Phil was not here. So Garry rode again into town and spent hours with the county surveyor and others at the courthouse who had any knowledge of lines up here. And, that done, he saw what ground, whether shifting or solid, Ballinger stood on.

Ballinger had taken options, which now he began to exercise, on adjacent lands. And it appeared, on running back through records, that one purchaser after another had been most careless in such trifles as surveys and exact lines. Ranches here were big; what was more, they were unfenced. What if one neighbor did cut another's tree? Who cared? There were trees aplenty. What if one man's stock roved on another's land? Stock had the way of doing that, always had, and, as men hereabouts seemed to regard it, always would. A man knew where the body of his ranch lay, and precious little did he care about the fringes of it. Enough to hire a surveyor? Certainly not. And so, if Ballinger liked to precipitate argument of one sort or another, he had the opportunity at his hand.

Garry Moncton, though there were those times when the hot blood drummed in his ears, was determined to hold his hand all that a man could. And, therefore, a natural result, the things which Ballinger spoke so openly of him began to be believed. That he was the two things for which your frontiersman, no

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matter where the frontier, does not abide in tolerance: A crook and a coward. Yet though Garry knew this, and his mouth grew hard and set under the knowledge, he went his way in cool deliberateness. That way first of all, he said within himself, was toward constant search for Phil Kent or some further sign of him; after that to a surer knowledge of his own ground in the matter of property right. Should it come to open battle, he meant to stand on his own land and not astraddle of any man's border.

So he brought in a surveyor, and he set a lawyer to work at the county seat; and he closed his ears to the sound of crashing timber, and the suspicion of jeering voices, and sought his vanished friend. There were cliffs on the north; unlikely, yet entirely possible, for a man to have fallen there. He penetrated thickets. He rode miles in many directions, hunting out all ranch men who might have seen Kent or one who had. He did not go out of his way to avoid Ballinger; neither did he seek him. He played that hardest of all games, the waiting game. When he had something definite from his surveyors and from his lawyer, he meant to be ready for whatever action the findings dictated.

Once a week, of a Saturday afternoon, he went down the mountain trails to Paradise House. Jim Paradise he found unchanged, smooth, and affable, and courteous, a man safely removed from the eddies of the contentions of other men that were not his contentions. Eve, as he saw at a glance, was constrained, a little nervous, more than a little fearful. For the rumors which came to her ears had nothing in them to make for her customary bubbling happiness. And Ballinger, too, continued his Saturday night visits.

Not the Bob Ballinger of her friendship and of almost more than that. He ignored her when he came in, and she soon rose and left the room. He stared fiercely at Jim Paradise, no longer a man for the gambler to hector.

"I want a game, Paradise," he said brusquely. "A game, hear you? There's no roof over the table to-night."

"As you like," said Paradise curtly. "You're drunk——"

"But you'll play me?"

The gambler laughed at him.

"Sober or drunk, I'll play you; and the result will be the same in either case. It's just a question of what you can afford to lose."

Ballinger drank and played and pulled money up out of his pocket. There were five at the table at ten o'clock when they started. When dawn came there were two. And for once in his life Jim Paradise failed to gauge his man. Drink gave Ballinger cunning; it gave him a new fierce recklessness. And in the end, when Paradise shrugged and rose, Ballinger, too, rose, and stamped in his ugly laughter and crammed his winnings into his pockets.

"What I want I take!" he shouted noisily. "Hear me, Paradise? It's just for me to make up my mind if I want a thing or not." He stuck his two big hands under his host's nose, fingers distended, then suddenly jerked them shut into quivering fists. "Like that!" And he went stamping and reeling out.

Tales of the game and of the timberjack's winnings, which were variously reported at from a thousand to ten thousand dollars, went their swift way to the accretion of rumors centering about a new Bob Ballinger. They came to Garry, conveyed by a glowering Joe Miner.

"I'm a fool to stick here, and I know it," groaned the little man. "He's gone nuts, that big stiff; he's ripe to do murder and scalp his man after he's dead. I ought to be on my way."

"Oh, the man's forgotten all about you——"

"Nary, and don't you fool yourself, Mr. Moncton! I been talking with a

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friend of mine; he's a nice quiet little Swede, works for Ballinger and don't like him, and he gave me the low-down. Ballinger's heard I'm not far off—and he's looking for me."

"Why don't you fade out of the picture for a while, then? Go down to San Francisco and spend a month riding ferryboats."

"I might," said Joe, pulling at his lip. "I might, at that, Garry."

For he was afraid. Yet when downright fear would have driven, something opposed to it held him back. He was an inquisitive little man and curiosity now so itched in him that he was never for a minute quiet. Rifle on shoulder, he sneaked out before daylight; he came creeping back after dark. At first, Garry merely supposed his acts were entirely precautionary; that he was hiding from Ballinger. Yet now and then Joe, bursting with talkativeness, dropped hints. And it grew out of them that his journeyings forth were in the nature of spying expeditions. He wanted to know what Abe Vickery's presence here indicated; what it was that bound up that strange triumvirate, Vickery, the weasel; Slyke, the snake; and Ballinger, the wolf.

And so it was that, at once fearful and curious, it was this spirit of investigation of his which led him into very serious danger. That he came out of his experience alive was perhaps due in the first place to the fact that Joe when sufficiently moved was capable of emitting a yell which penetrated great distances, and next to the fortunate circumstance that Garry Moncton had grown into the habit of bending his path close to a certain place whenever riding north.

That spot whose vicinity invited more than one man on this memorable morning was near the old, long-deserted mining camp which in its hectic youth had flourished as Michigan City. Of late, Garry began to entertain queer notions; ideas which in sober daylight scattered and dissolved into instable mists and were banished as fantastic, yet which night after night when the house was quiet and he lay sleepless flocked into a troubled mind. Similar fancies intrigued Joe Miner. What was Vickery here for? Vickery, and Slyke, and Ballinger? Joe wanted to know.

He went on foot, wedded to stealth. Some weeks of practiced elusiveness superimposed upon an innate ability made the little man as adept as any storied Indian in creeping unnoticed through the woods. Drawn near the thick grove of ridepole pines which usurped the thoroughfare of the olden, golden day, he heard sounds which started up two strangely conflicting sets of emotions within him. There was a gratified eagerness which gloated, which pulled on the leash, which urged him forward. There was a quick, icy fear which actually made his flesh prickle. What he had heard was a voice, and while he stood tightly pressed against the trunk of one of the larger trees, another voice, and still another came to him. Ballinger's, the first, and dominating the others though all were hushed; then Slyke's, then Vickery's. Joe, of one mind to creep forward, of another to take to his heels, stood rooted to the spot. His hands were locked about his rifle in a grim, frozen sort of desperation. For the voices were very, very near.

He had not been heard. That was one thing, and Joe filled his lungs with a long breath. Ballinger was speaking again. Joe leaned forward, tipping his head to one side, listening with all his might. After all, it was a free country, he had his rifle, and readiness with a gun counted for more than muscular bulk. A man had a right to listen; ah, and the right of rights to defend himself! Ballinger had better look out.

Whatever it was that was under discussion by the three conspirators—for in Joe's suspicious mind conspirators they

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were—he was fated to hear never a word of it. In the first place, though he inched forward the last final inch he dared, the voices were too low. And therein lay a fact which made Joe all the more certain, and not without reason, that if he could come by a generous earful now he would be a long way forward on the road to the answers of many questions which irked him. Joe twisted himself like a man of rubber, leaning out, thrusting forth the small inquisitive head at the end of his thin, strained neck——

In the first place, the lowered voices; in the second, a sound which betrayed the listener, and through no fault of his own, for never a dead stick snapped under his tread. A sound for which he was in nowise responsible, yet which in its results might as well have been a shout from his lips, announcing, "Ballinger, I'm here!" It was only a little brush rabbit that, so still was Joe, had chanced close to him, that was suddenly advised by a softly stirring current of air that a man was near-by; that caught a startled glimpse of Joe and plunged off in a panicky flurry. Through dead leaves, under gooseberry bushes, with a noise which struck upon several pairs of ears like an explosion.

Ballinger leaped to his feet and whirled, staring. Only now did Joe catch his first broken glimpse of the big fellow's stalwart form, and in Joe's goggling eyes it took on giant proportions.

"It's nothing," said Vickery. "Only a——"

But Ballinger was frowning and suspicious and came hurrying forward. Instantly, Joe's battle-mindedness of a moment ago evaporated; he began withdrawing backward, cautious, crouching, clutching his gun as though it were the proverbial straw and himself the man in deep waters. Ballinger stooped for something; a stone, though Joe could not make out what it was and was no longer curious.

Ballinger came on with a rush, breaking through a waist-high thicket of bushes, plunging into the grove. Joe turned to run at the moment Ballinger saw him. There was a mighty shout, triumphant and threatening at once. Joe, himself leaping into a running stride the instant that he turned, careened full tilt into a tree. A second shout burst from Ballinger, a shout of certain victory now. Joe again turned, whipping up his rifle. But Ballinger charged on, utterly regardless and reckless of what looked so like certain death, and as he ran he hurled the stone he had snatched up. It struck the little man full in the chest and with such fearful impact that Joe staggered backward and sagged limply, his rifle falling.

Then, before he could stiffen to defense, escape entirely out of his mind, Ballinger got him. Got him in both powerful hands and swept him off his feet and hurled him very much as he had just now hurled a missile. The rifle he sent flying with a kick of a heavy lumberman's boot which left Joe's right arm numb from shoulder to finger tips.

Ballinger stood, legs apart, big hands on his hips, staring down at him. His eyes were red and heavy-lidded from all that he had gone through of late, and bright and hard and hot with malicious evil.

"Now!" said Ballinger. "Now!"

That was all that he said; even the one word repeated came with slow difficulty. He had the look of a man choking to death.

Joe stirred, meaning to sit up, then to plunge to his feet and run to his fallen weapon. But now Ballinger stirred, too, and more swiftly. He caught the little man by the shoulder and jerked him to his feet. Holding him off at arm's length, Ballinger struck with his free fist, taking Joe square between the eyes. And Joe sagged, limp now as not even under the impact of the stone.

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His head hung loosely against his shoulder.

Ballinger dragged him back to the spot where Vickery and Slyke stood in nervous expectancy.

"You've killed him!"

"Not yet—the rat!"

Presently, Joe opened his eyes. Ballinger stood over him with a dripping bucket of water, and already Joe was soaking from head to foot. A shiver of cold or a shudder of apprehension shook him; he sat up weakly, and Ballinger, as long as he had the water, used it, sloshing it into Joe's white face.

"Stand up!" he ordered.

Joe stood up, weak but obedient. He looked at Slyke, then at Vickery. Both men seemed alarmed and restless; both wished themselves anywhere but here. In neither was there any hope for Joe to reach out to.

"I've been looking for you for quite a while," said Ballinger. "You know that, don't you?"

Joe nodded miserably. A little color seeped back into his cheeks, which had been like Vickery's for pasty colorlessness; a little spurt of fire flared up in his breast.

"You leave me alone, Ballinger. I'll kill you for this——"

"Shut up! Leave you alone? If there's any killing—right now I'm going to come so close to killing you that if there happens to be any life left in you, you'll never bring it around my way looking for trouble again."

Slowly his fists balled; his heavy jaw shot forward; the red evil burned up brighter than ever in his eyes.

Joe read what was coming and stiffened himself; he locked his jaws against any whimpering outcry; he drew to the depths of his manhood then, vowing to live through whatever punishment came his way, and in the fullness of time to repay his debt. But so violently elemental and merciless was the red evil in Ballinger's eyes that at the last moment Joe strove to escape again, and failing he screamed.

A little while ago Garry Moncton had thought that he heard a man shout. He had not been sure, though he stopped his horse and sat very still listening. Nothing. Yet, already headed toward the old mining camp, he rode on, alert, harkening to every little sound. And now, as clear as a bugle call, Joe's scream burst upon him.

"Look out!" warned Slyke anxiously. "Somebody's coming."

Ballinger growled. Garry Moncton on horseback burst into the clearing. Even then Ballinger turned from his victim reluctantly and without withdrawal of his thoughts. And then he saw who it was that had come so close to riding him down, and in that instant Joe Miner was forgotten as completely as though he had never existed.

"He's killing me!" cried out Joe.

Finding himself free, he started back, only to collapse from dizzy faintness. As he settled to earth, Garry saw the red trickle running down his face from the wound inflicted by Ballinger's fist.

"Ballinger, you're a cur and a coward!"

Ballinger glared at him and at the rifle in his hands, grim in silence. But his silence did not last. Fear did not reside in him, fear in his present mood was a thing of which he had no slightest comprehension, a rifle in his enemy's hands was less than a rotten stick. He burst into reckless foulness of speech, inviting destruction with the very words he used.

Until Garry burst upon them there had been only one man here in the grip of the ancient thirst for vengeance. Now there were two.

"Shoot!" shouted the big timberjack, and squared his body. "Shoot and be danged to you."

Beyond him Garry saw the tortured face of his little friend. He looked like a wizened child. And Garry came down

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out of the saddle on the most urgent of all errands. The thought of shooting Ballinger did not so much as suggest itself to him; he hurled his rifle aside as though he, too, regarded it as a stick and a poor thing for use. And Ballinger, reading his purpose shouted again, now in a sort of terrible joyousness, and rushed to meet him.

The psychology of personal encounter has its roots in a time when the world was very young, very lusty, very forthright. When sheer rage dominates and drives, it is a natural thing to do as Garry Moncton did and attack the bare-handed bare-handedly. Reason for the moment steps aside; primordial rage rules, and heated brains reel back through dim centuries to the ancient order of things. Flesh against flesh, and instinct is satisfied.

The two men struck such blows at the very outset as neither had ever struck in his life before. Blows which landed and jarred and bruised, and were felt only as stings which put fresh poison stimulus into rage which already towered. The two men met with an impact which shocked them bodily; from the flail of blows each staggered backward. But backward a pace only; they tottered as though each were giving a grotesque imitation of the other; they rushed back into the storm of blows.

"Kill him, Garry! Kill him, Garry! Kill him, Garry!" Joe rolling out of the way of the thrashing boots kept up his incessant whining prayer; for prayer it was for its very gasping fervency.

The two men were equally hard and enraged, and determined; into neither could the mere fear of bodily torture enter. If any handicap existed on either part it was constituted by Garry's riding quirt. He had ridden with it slung by a thong to his right wrist. It was the usual Western whip, the butt end weighted with shot, the lighter end a leathern lash. He had had no thought for such a trifle and now had no time nor opportunity to free himself of it. As he struck, it writhed like a snake swung by the tail; it interfered with perfect freedom. It did even more. It hissed about Ballinger and put a vague, bitter memory into him, the memory of a moment when Garry had menaced him with it and had gone on jeering at him.

Once it came near being Garry's undoing. He lashed out with his right hand. Ballinger caught the dangling quirt and dragged Garry close to him, hampering his right arm, using his own with a flash of savage certainty, striking mightily for the jaw. The blow landed and was within an inch of ending the fight. But even as Garry saw what was comng so swiftly, he bent and twisted his head, taking Ballinger's fist on the cheek, and jerking back freed himself and went tottering out of reach. The stout leathern thong held; the quirt slipped free of Ballinger's clutch.

That blow Ballinger followed up with another and another, and as Garry yielded ground, Joe Miner made the air ring with his mingled pleadings, prayers, and cursings. But only a step or two did Moncton retreat, shaking his head, clearing his brain, hoping for the chance to shake off the quirt which so hindered him. A chance which Ballinger, understanding, was grimly determined should not be allowed him.

There was not a man in Ballinger's camp of iron-muscled, sure-eyed men who could have stood up to him for three minutes, a thing Ballinger knew well and which Garry could now understand. Never since boyhood had the big timberjack been defeated at this sort of thing, and there was not the least flicker of doubt in his reddened eyes as he pressed eagerly for quick and decisive victory. As Garry drew back those few steps, Ballinger's mouth twisted into a grin of hatred triumphant.

"Look out, Garry! There's a big rock behind——"

Garry did not hear Joe's warning.

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But it was not needed. He had already done with retreat. He saw an opening, and leaped in to take advantage of it. This time it was his left hand which he shot through his opponent's guard, and it caught Ballinger square upon the point of the chin and lifted him off his feet so that he was flung backward and fell heavily. Fell at the very moment of his victory.

He came up slowly, a moment confused. Then, as the light cleared in his eyes, Garry was on him again; right, left; right, left, anywhere; to the upper body, to the throat, smashing into the face. And now it was Ballinger's turn to draw back, and shake his head, and growl like a wounded bear. He, like Garry before him, sought some few seconds of respite. His eyes flashed sidewise; they were no less determined, though it may be they were less certain. They saw the two men, Slyke and Vickery, standing, staring.

Garry knew what was in his thought then, and his heart leaped within him. Ballinger was on the verge of calling for help. But he did not call; he set his jaw and forgot these two companions of his, men with whom he had business but never mates for such as Bob Ballinger. Furtive men, not fighters. Not fighters, at least, in the open and with their hands.

That sidesweep of his eyes came close to costing Ballinger the battle. Also, oddly enough, it came close to costing Garry Moncton his life. Ballinger stumbled; he had retreated to the old log on which a few minutes before he had been sitting; a boot heel caught and he went over backward, sprawling. He flung out a hand to save himself; it closed with leaping fingers upon the thing they touched; his own heavy, double-bitted ax.

"With my hands—with an ax—with anything—I'll kill you!"

Nothing now, short of killing, could satisfy him. He swung the ugly weapon with its four-pound head high in air, both hands welded about the straight hickory handle; he trod underfoot the more ancient day of weaponless combat and at a bound became the fighting man of that later day, when mace met battle-ax, and skulls crushed like eggshells.

He saw Garry's face turn white; with fear, thought Ballinger, and burst into savage laughter. With rage, had he but thought twice.

As he rushed forward, he struck, and the wind of the blow blew in Garry's face. But a blow like that, missing, demanded one of those precious seconds in which the striker must catch his balance and swing his weapon aloft again. Garry, instinctively clutching for any weapon as Ballinger found his own, had but the heavy butt of his quirt to fall upon. Yet a whip was something, and he used it like a whip, and the four-ply leather lash cut Ballinger across the face and drew the blood.

"That's keeping an old promise, Ballinger!"

The blow of a fist is one thing, the sting of a whip another. Ballinger roared with rage and rushed Garry again with his ax. Garry flicked at him and leaped backward. Joe tried crawling for the fallen rifle. But it was under the trampling feet of the two men, and Ballinger saw Joe's movement and glared at him, ax poised, and Joe jerked back.

One blow now was all that Bob Ballinger wanted, and never in his life had he wanted anything so much. Not even Eve when he had yearned for her. Lights changed and shifted in his narrowed eyes; there was the urge to hurl his ax and so come up with the man who leaped always out of reach. Yet to throw and miss was to end in disaster. So he held mad impulse in check and bided his time, hastening it all that he could, rushing like a mad bull.

Again Garry flicked at him with his

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whip, flicking a red welt into his face and a new access of red rage into his heart. Ballinger risked a second blow; risked more than he knew. From a lash, Garry had of a sudden made his quirt into something of a true weapon; he shifted his grip, catching the lash end in his hand, swing the heavy, loaded butt. As the ax head flashed before his eyes, he sprang, not back, but to the side; as Ballinger lunged forward, arms straight out following the impetus of the blow, Garry struck, swinging his quirt in a hissing circle. And the shot-weighted end came crashing down on Ballinger's head, and Ballinger crumpled and went down in a quiet heap. The ax slipped from his fingers. The thing was done.

Garry, white-faced, with eyes that flashed like blue fire, stood over him; ever watchful. But Ballinger did not stir.

"You've killed him——"

That was Slyke. Garry stared at him indifferently, then caught up the ax and sent it spinning, far out among the bushes. He went to his rifle and only then turned to Vickery.

"You've been a doctor in your time, haven't you?" he said curtly. "Look him over!"

Vickery was twisting his hands nervously; now he started and hurried forward, kneeling by Ballinger's quiet body. He licked his lips and looked up.

"No. Not dead. Stunned. I guess that's all. Skull isn't cracked."

"All right. Tell him for me when he wakes up that the next time I'll not let go of my rifle—come ahead, Joe."

Joe followed Garry in a new and meek sort of silence, now and then with a cold shiver, now and then glancing back over his shoulder.

"I've seen a fight to-day, Mr. Moncton," he said in a queer hushed voice. Awe was in it.

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

In Next Week's Issue of Western Story Magazine

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By Max Brand

A dog is the friend of man, if man is the friend of a dog.

NAILED UP
By Robert Ormond Case

A trailer on a trailer's trail—a sinister and powerful short story of the great North.

BOLTS AND BARS
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Not So Wild

By Roy W. Hinds

Author of "Stars and Stripes," etc.

THE big mirror behind the bar in the Osage saloon had twice saved the life of Bart Booker. As a consequence, he had a friendly feeling for the brightly polished looking-glass, and while drinking was given much to gazing into it, not only at his own reflection, which he regarded as especially well favored, but also at the reflections of sundry individuals at the bar or moving about in the big room behind him.

On two occasions Bart Booker's mortal enemy, Steve Standish, had wandered into the Osage saloon in quest of trouble—that is to say, in quest of Bart Booker. But the mirror, from the point at which Bart usually stood, reflected the door of the saloon, and Bart had espied Steve before the latter could jerk out his gun.

In the first instance, Bart had been enabled to beat a quick retreat, by way of the side door shielded by the crowd. On the second occasion, he had not retreated. Steve Standish was the man who retreated, and in a horizontal fashion, borne out dead, while onlookers held Bart Booker. Steve had a bullet in the back of his head, shot by Bart Booker before he was aware that Bart was around.

That was the reason the crowd held Bart Booker, hoping that he would be locked up and eventually convicted of murder. It was an unfair shot, cowardly, in fact, for Steve did not even have his hand on his gun; he was very drunk, so muddled indeed that he had been unable to recognize Bart Booker at a distance of ten feet.

The general run of inhabitants in Prairie City were not averse to a man's shooting another if he did it in fair combat. It had long been known that Bart

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Booker and Steve Standish were gunning for one another, and that some day one of them would go down. Steve had been known as a "square shooter." Bart had not. In fact, there were several notches on Bart's gun that got there as a result of sly advantages he took of his victims. He caught them too drunk to defend themselves usually; and in some cases he shot from behind. Once it was rumored he shot from ambush, but as there were no positive witnesses Bart's plea of self-defense stood.

Bart Booker was not liked very well. The killing of Steve Standish lowered him even further in the public esteem of Prairie City, and lately on his visits to town he had found it necessary to drink alone, for the simple reason that none would drink with him. But he was as brazen and impudent as ever, wearing his clothes jauntily and, while drinking, uttering his usual boastful talk in respect to his own qualifications and attributes.

He always took exceptional pains with his appearance. The garments he wore, roughly Western in style, were, nevertheless, of expensive quality and always well cared for. His cartridge belt and holsters were studded with fancy designs in nickel and brass; his boots glistened; the hair of his chaps was brushed neatly, and he had a rakishly romantic way of wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a flowing necktie. By hook or crook he managed to get the money necessary to indulge his vanity for personal adornment.

And on the occasion of this visit to Prairie City there was everything in Bart Booker's appearance to bear out the assumption that affairs had gone well with him financially.

He had galloped into town with a flourish along toward noon, waving a friendly hand to decidedly unfriendly citizens along the main street. His general disrepute seemed not to dismay him at all. He made a pretense of not being aware of it. He saluted amiably men who hated him, and appeared to be oblivious of their cold receptions. It was another streak in his conceited nature that did not sit well in Prairie City.

It was a hot, dusty day. Bringing his horse up short in a cloud of dust from the animal's skidding hoofs, Bart swung to the ground and called merry greetings to a knot of bystanders in front of the Osage saloon:

"Howdy, boys! Excuse my dust, but I'm in a hurry. I ain't had a drink in two months, and my throat's cracking. Come on in, and join me."

They declined, some with mere shakes of the head, others with a few short words. Bart was not in the least taken aback. He seemed not to notice the disfavor he was in, but continued amiably:

"Well, that's all right, boys. Far be it from me to coax a man to drink when he don't want to drink. Drinking is a man's own business, and I admire your will power. So if you don't mind I'll mosey in alone—and spend a bit off this roll."

He accompanied his words with the production of a roll of paper money astounding in its size and eye-compelling in the engraved denominations of its bills as he riffled them for the benefit of the crowd. Yet Bart's money could not produce even the wraith of a friendly smile on my face, poor man's or otherwise, that studied the roll. Prairie City wanted nothing to do with Bart Booker or his money.

Grinning with the satisfaction that possession of the money gave him, Bart walked into the barroom.

"Pocahontas" Smith, the horse-faced bartender who had been a witness at Bart's trial for the slaying of Steve Standish—and a witness for the prosecution, too—was on duty. There was not a single customer at the bar as Bart walked up to it.

"Well, well!" he cried exuberantly, as though just catching sight of his

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warmest friend. "If here ain't my old pal, Pocahontas Smith—still riding herd on the liquor bottles on this here drink ranch! Howdy, 'Poke'?"

"Howdy," Poke growled.

He did not move up to the bar from where he stood leaning against the back bar, nor did he unfold his arms. His eye was cold. But Bart Booker was not a man to be turned back by mere incivility.

"It's great to see you again, Poke," he went on, spreading his elbows on the bar and regarding himself favorably in the big mirror. "It sure is! I been hankering for a look at your handsome face for two months now, and riding across the prairie this morning, I sure did touch up that horse of mine, so's I'd get to see you right soon. Well, Poke—thanks for the warm greeting, and now what d'you say we have a little drink?"

"What'll it be?" Pocahontas rejoined, with no evidence at all of thawing, stepping to the bar.

"Red-liquor," was the answer.

In payment for the drink, which Poke served while Bart kept up a running fire of talk, the latter took a bill from the stupendous roll in such fashion that the bartender got a good look at the whole thing. It was an amazing amount of money, true enough, but it brought no comment from Poke. Bart was satisfied, however, with having let him see it. Like all vain men who love money and care little how they get it, he had an idea that his roll would excite envy first and then perhaps companionableness. But he was doomed to disappointment in so far as Pocahontas Smith and the general run of citizens were concerned.

Bart Booker had pulled too many shady killings to be able now to buy comradeship with all the gold of the Indies.

Other customers drifted in, singly and in groups, but Bart did not pick up a drinking companion. He chattered along, absorbing drink after drink, and growing more sarcastically agreeable all the while. Nothing was said about it, but Prairie City could not forget especially the bullet in the back of Steve Standish's head, nor the fact that Bart was acquitted on that charge because of evidence he produced that Steve had threatened to shoot him on sight. It was true that Steve was gunning for him, but every one knew that Steve meant to have a fair gun fight with Bart. Steve had not been a man who would shoot another in the back, nor would he have yanked out his gun without warning. It was rumored that the witnesses for the defense were bribed. Bart Booker was acquitted in court, but not in the minds of the populace. Even the jury, which was bound by the evidence and the court's instructions in view of it, privately thought that Bart Booker should have been hanged.

All the while, the amiable gunman studied his face in the mirror, the same in which he had seen Steve Standish's reflection before Steve saw him. The feud with Steve had gone on for a year or more, and involved first a quarrel in a card game. It grew with the months, as feuds do in a gun-swinging country, but Steve Standish made the mistake of appearing off-guard and drunk in his enemy's presence.

Suddenly, as Bart Booker was looking into the friendly mirror, and thinking of the favor that stretch of glass had done him on two occasions, he espied the reflection of a man behind him.

The fellow was a stranger, with a woebegone look. He was a big man, somewhat the worse for hardships, and he did not walk up to the bar for the simple reason that he lacked the price of a drink. He was wandering aimlessly up and down the room when Bart Booker noticed him, and turned with a smile on his face and an invitation on his lips.

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"Well now, stranger—how about a little drink with me?"

The downcast face of the stranger brightened. He looked at Bart at first unbelievingly and then gratefully, and marched straight to the bar.

"Don't care if I do," he said. "Thanks."

They drank and conversed, each studying the other's reflection in the mirror. The stranger's idea of Bart seemed to be that he was a prosperous individual, perhaps a foreman on a ranch or maybe the owner of a ranch. Bart's slick appearance, as well as the roll which he took pains to exhibit, apparently lifted him in the estimation of his guest out of the cowboy class.

Bart Booker's idea of his new acquaintance was not so favorable. He was a fairly young man but haggard. Strong enough under usual circumstances, but weakened now by privation, dilapidated as to clothing. His garments were of the makeshift variety. Furthermore, under his haggardness there seemed to be a furtive quality—a mannerism of studying attentively, either directly or in the mirror, every man who came into the barroom. Fear, Bart decided.

Well, Bart Booker could use such a man—a man who had reason to be watchful, and to conceal his identity, and one perhaps who would not be overscrupulous as to how he got hold of a piece of money.

Those who knew Bart Booker perceived that he had formed a new acquaintance; but it is not the way of the West to warn strangers that they are in bad company.

So, apparently, a friendship ripened between Bart Booker and this rather mysterious and forlorn visitor in Prairie City. At least, an understanding grew up between them. If outward appearances went for anything, they were birds of a feather.

The stranger called himself Johnson—Curt Johnson, he added, when he and Bart had withdrawn from the Osage saloon to an eating house near by. He came, he said vaguely, from the East. He added, though it wasn't necessary, that he'd had a streak of hard luck—that he was broke and homeless.

Bart had had a lot to drink, but a certain definite purpose that lurked in his mind kept him from getting drunk with abandonment.

"I s'pose," Bart suggested, "that you're looking for a job."

"Sure!" Johnson rejoined. "And I'd be mighty glad to get one."

"Can you ride a horse?"

"Yes. I never did any ranching, but I've done a lot of riding. In fact," he said, slowly, as though reluctant to reveal more than necessary about himself, "riding horses is my specialty."

Bart pricked up his ears.

"How's that—your specialty?"

"I used to be with a circus. I trained horses for the ring, and rode 'em lots. I can do fancy stunts at riding."

Bart Booker half closed his eyes, and said dreamily:

"Well now, that's fine—mighty fine. You're just the man I'm looking for."

"Do you run a ranch?" Curt Johnson inquired.

"I'm a horse trader," Bart replied, careful that no other patron in the restaurant heard him, for Prairie City had long been mystified as to how Bart Booker got hold of his money, and would have been much surprised at his announcement.

"Horse trader, eh?" said Johnson, finishing his second cup of coffee. "Well, I'm your man. I sure know horses."

Bart looked at him sharply, and asked:

"Wild horses—do you know wild horses?"

"Well now," Johnson replied, "I don't know as I do know wild horses—not what you call wild horses here in the

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West. You mean horses that ain't ever been touched?"

"Sure, that's it. They ain't never been touched by a bit or harness, they ain't never smelt leather, or et nothing but wild grass and wild oats."

Johnson stirred nervously in his chair.

"Mr. Booker," he said, "I didn't know there was any wild horses left in the West. I know there's lots of horse ranches, but wild horses that don't belong to any man, and are the property of any one that corrals 'em—I thought they were finished."

"That's where you're wrong," Bart assured the young man. "I can take you up in the hills, thirty miles from here, and show you a whole valley full of wild horses."

Johnson nodded.

"Well," he said, "you know, and I don't. But I ain't never had no experience with that kind of stock, but I suppose I can learn. What do you want me to do on this job?"

"Grab these horses," Bart told him, "one at a time—and fetch 'em across to a place I'll show you. You see, Johnson, this herd of horses just come down into the valley I'm speaking about, from up in the mountains some place. Nobody knows where they come from—and there ain't nobody but me knows they're in that valley. They'll stay there, as the grass is lush. They belong to any man that grabs 'em. We ought to be able to cut a couple hundred head out of that drove before anybody else spots 'em. Naturally, we want to keep this thing to ourselves."

"Sure thing!" Johnson agreed.

"That valley is out of the way. I'm in the horse trade, and I'm always looking for a good bet. A couple of years ago I spotted that valley, with just a few horses in it. But I saw what fine grass it's got, and I said to myself that one of these seasons, when the mountains're dry, and the grass burns up on the slopes, there's goin' to be a big drove of wild horses come down for grass. I been watching that valley. There's a little stream in it, and there's always lush grass. Sure enough, I come by there the other day, and seen so many wild horses I couldn't count 'em. They're ours for the taking of 'em. Now I'll pay you twenty-five dollars for every horse you cut out of the herd. I got a prior claim on 'em, as you can see, for I found 'em. I know where to market 'em quick, too. You won't have nothing to do but fetch the horses to me."

Curt Johnson was either a fool or a rogue. If the latter, he was wise enough to conceal whatever suspicions may have been aroused by this strange proposal. It seems that any muttonhead should know that stock of any kind graze in low places. Sheep are much given to wandering up hillsides and even into mountains, for they are sure-footed beasts and continually in quest of shoots and herbs that grow in brush; but cattle and horses are grass eaters, and the best grass is in the valleys—around a stream, not up on the slopes of mountains.

If Johnson's suspicions were not aroused, he was a fool. If he was aware that Bart Booker was concealing the real state of affairs in respect to the horses in the valley, he was perhaps a rogue.

At any rate, late that night, Bart Booker and Curt Johnson galloped out of town together.

The Four-Point horse ranch, owned by Andrew Saylor, was thirty miles from Prairie City, just beyond the range of foothills that marked the end of the prairie and the beginning of the mountains. The Four-Point grazing lands consisted of a series of green valleys, about which the hills served as fences for the most part.

In the South Valley, as the extreme grassland was called, there was no sign

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of a man-made fence, for at the end of this there was a series of cliffs between two hills that operated as an effective rampart against any tendency of the horses to stray.

The ranch buildings, and indeed all the fences and everything else constructed by the hand of man, were much farther up the chain of valleys, so that an observer seeing only the South Valley might be deluded into thinking, if he were strange to the West and unacquainted with the system of raising stock, that the bowllike inclosure was wild land and the horses therein one of those wild herds that were once so plentiful in the West.

But a horseman should know better, even from a distance, by the placidity of the animals upon the approach of a man or many men, and also by the general appearance of the herd. If he got close enough to examine the horses he could have found certain marks upon them in the shape of four-pointed stars, the brand of the Four-Point horse ranch.

But Bart Booker had a scheme to delude Curt Johnson, if Johnson turned out to be a fellow who would balk at stealing another man's property.

They entered the foothills at a point below the South Valley, skirting it in a wide circle, and riding through passes and over low hills familiar to Bart Booker. About sunup they came to what turned out to be one of Bart Booker's lairs.

Booker, who had bought a horse and saddle for Johnson in Prairie City, which the latter was to pay for out of his profits in the "wild horse" adventure, watched his companion sharply for any sign that he might be growing suspicious. But no such sign came. Johnson appeared to be unusually stupid, but he certainly was a good rider, and now that he was fed and freshened up somewhat, he appeared extremely strong and capable.

"He'll make me a good man," Booker ruminated, already with a feeling of proprietorship over Johnson. "If he acts all right, there's plenty of stuff me and him can pull together in this country."

This lair of Bart Booker's had all the evidence of a prepared camp. There was a cave in one of the cliffs. Bart explained all this with the remark:

"Just one of my stopping places. I've got a string of 'em. The horse business takes me over a big stretch of country, and I have to have camp. Some day—maybe—I'll show you my headquarters."

This was a significant remark.

"I'd certainly like to keep right on working for you, Mr. Booker," Johnson rejoined.

"Well, maybe you will. We'll see about that. But let's shake up some breakfast, and then sleep a while."

That afternoon they took a ride through the hills. From a certain eminence they looked down into South Valley, and upon hundreds of grazing horses. There was not a man in sight.

"There they be," said Bart Booker.

"Wild horses?"

"Wild horses."

Bart had about come to the idea that Curt Johnson was a fool. So much the better, if he was not a hopelessly honest fool. The less brains he had, the less profit he would demand from the various enterprises Bart Booker had in mind.

"They don't look wild to me," said Johnson.

"That's because your ideas of wild horses come from pictures," Booker assured him. "You think wild horses are always on the run, with their feet r'ared up and their manes and tails streaming."

"Maybe."

"Now, them horses down there—I'll show you to-night how to handle wild horses."

And he did.

That night they rode again to South Valley but this time did not halt at the

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ring of hills. They came into the valley through a pass at the north, and from the edge of the herd there cut out two horses each, securing them with snaffle ropes around their noses. With a horse on each side of him, Curt Johnson rode his mount behind Bart Booker, slowly, to manage the animals he was leading away.

"They're mighty tame for wild horses," Johnson commented.

"Wild horses are always that way at night," Booker explained with an inward chuckle. "Now, if it was daytime, they'd r'ar up and kick blazes out of us."

He did not explain that he chose night for this excursion for various reasons, one of which was to keep his companion from observing the marks on the animals.

Presently, Johnson said: "I don't care whether they're wild horses or tame horses."

"What d'you mean?" Booker demanded quickly.

"Just what I said," the man behind answered placidly. "There's money in horses wild or tame."

"That's the way to talk," said Bart Booker happily. "There ain't no use of me and you kidding one another any longer. You said it, Curt—there's money in horses—and we'll make three more trips to that herd before daylight."

"Suits me, Bart."

Thus did a compact of thieves seem to be concluded.

Three nights later Bart Booker sat alone at the mouth of the cave in the hills behind South Valley. It was starlight and warm.

Bart smoked his pipe contentedly, for things certainly were going fine. Every morning Bart drove through the passes away from South Valley the horses that Curt Johnson had stolen during the night. Some distance away he was met by a crooked horse trader and his men, who relieved Bart of the stolen animals and paid him cash. The horses were quickly driven by a secret route into the mountains and distributed to other markets in ways understood by men in that undercover business. Then Bart would ride back to his camp, and before the day was out he would pay Curt Johnson twenty-five dollars a head for the animals he had brought in. As Bart got about a hundred dollars a head, his profits are apparent.

After the first night, Bart did not visit South Valley. There was always the danger that trouble would occur there. A trap might be set any day, and Bart did not mean to fall into it himself. Curt Johnson took all the chances in South Valley. That was Bart Booker's way. He figured that they would call it a job well done after this night's work, for safety's sake, for the Four-Point outfit would be tumbling to the thefts any day now. Besides, Bart had enterprises in other regions, and he planned to take Curt Johnson along with him.

It was early in the night, and Johnson was on his first journey to South Valley. He was due back now with two stolen horses.

Curt Johnson came back all right, but only with the horse he rode. At least, that was the only animal that Bart Booker noticed at first. Bart had moved back into the woods a little, to await Curt's coming.

"What's the matter?" he asked, alarmed.

Johnson had not seen him there in the woods, but the instant Bart spoke he turned and dismounted. He did this leisurely, and Bart's alarm was somewhat relieved.

But not for long.

The leisurely movements of Curt Johnson gave way to surprising speed as he came face to face with Bart Booker.

A gun appeared in Johnson's hand so quickly that Bart had no time to get a hand on one of his own.

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"Toss up your hands!" Johnson commanded, and Booker's hands went up as the dry constriction of fright seized his throat.

Johnson stepped close; dug his gun against Bart, and in a twinkling disarmed him and stepped back.

"We'll make it short and snappy," Curt Johnson announced. "I ain't got much more time to waste, and the quicker the better for you. Know who I am, Booker?"

"N—no, I don't know——"

"Well, my name's Standish."

Bart Booker's knees sagged, but he stiffened them with an effort.

"Standish—Standish? Why, you must be——"

"Sure I am. I'm Grant Standish. I'm the last of the three Standish boys. You killed Steve Standish in Prairie City. They all think there that your trouble with Steve was over a card game. They don't know how far back it goes, do they? They don't know that Steve Standish was the second of the family you shot in the back. You never told how you killed our oldest brother, back East, because he beat your time with a girl. No other reason at all—just because the girl liked him better than she did you. And you waylaid him, shot him in the back. That's how you came to be out West here, and traveling under the name of Bart Booker. You didn't tell about Steve Standish running across you accidentally, and never saying why he hated you so. You never said that Steve tried to get you to shoot it out with him several times, but you wouldn't—and he wouldn't take a shot at you because you wouldn't defend yourself. And finally you shot Steve in the back of the head. That's two of my brothers you've shot in the back, and several other fellows."

"B—but listen, Grant—I——"

"Shut up! There ain't no defense you can put in. You're good at defenses. You framed up an alibi when you killed the first Standish, but our town back East wasn't comfortable for you even if you were acquitted. And in Prairie City you got out of killing Steve. You've been on trial several times, but you always manage to have enough stolen money on you to hire the shrewdest lawyers, and lawyers that don't care what they do for money. You wiggle out of your killings.

"Well, when I heard that Steve had been killed out here and his murderer acquitted, I thought I'd come out and look into the case. I got a look at you, and I remembered. I'm a lot younger than you, and you saw me only when I was a kid. I figured that it was up to me. The law couldn't, or didn't, do anything about your killing my two brothers, so I thought I'd see what I could do.

"Andy Saylor gave me a job at Four-Point Ranch, and I told him the story, but I didn't say just what I was going to do. We figured we'd better catch you stealing horses. That means life in this State. So I hung around you that day in the Osage saloon, and you warmed up to me. We waited three days, so's we could trap the fellows you sell the horses to. Andy Saylor and the officers got them to-day, after you made your deal. The whole line is cleaned up, and Saylor's got his horses back. There's only one horse missing out of Saylor's grasslands now."

This last remark was mysterious indeed, and seemingly without point; but so filled with fright was Bart Booker that he read tragedy into every word of his captor.

"One horse missing," he began—"one horse? What——"

"Yeh. One horse. A wild horse."

Bart Booker couldn't understand this at all, couldn't see what young Grant Standish was driving at, but he knew that it meant no good to himself.

"They let me come after you alone," Standish went on. "Oh, I ain't got no

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friends laying in the woods, to help me. You and me are alone. We're going to have it out alone."

"Y-you mean—you mean, a duel?"

"No, no! No duel. I'm going to give you a ride on a wild horse. I'll explain later. Right now I want you to turn around, and stick your hands out straight in the back, with the palms together. Understand? Palms together, and be quick about it!"

When his victim was in the prescribed position, Grant Standish tossed the loop of a snaffle rope over Bart Booker's hands, and drew the noose tight about his wrists.

"Now march," he commanded; "straight ahead—and turn when I say to turn!"

A considerable distance back on the trail to South Valley, Bart Booker observed a horse tethered to a tree. His heart was filled with dire foreboding, but he asked no question about Standish's intentions, dreading the answer.

When he got closer, Bart discovered that the feet of the horse were hobbled. Vaguely, he began to understand—for he could see now, in a spread of starlight, that the animal was small and roan in color.

"That horse," he began. "That—that——"

"Yeh," Standish assured him, "that's him. That's Andy Saylor's Firewater. I guess you know what kind of a horse Firewater is, Bart. There ain't hardly nobody in this country that don't know Firewater. He's an institution. There ain't nobody rode him very far yet. He leads fine, but he just won't stand to be rode. And what he can't do to a man on his back——"

A gasp of horror escaped Bart Booker's dry lips.

"You—you ain't goin' to make me get on Firewater? Why—why, he's killed two men, and—he's thrown——"

"Well, that's all right, ain't it, Bart? Firewater's a killer, and you're a killer. It's one killer against another. If you can manage Firewater, away you go! If Firewater gets the best of you—well, he'll only be doing something the hangman ought to've done long ago. Now listen here. This wild-horse business came into my mind because you pulled that stuff about wild horses. The point is, Bart, that you didn't know who I was. I was, to you, a stranger, and broke. For a few measly dollars you'd trick a stranger into stealing horses, and horse stealing in this State means life imprisonment. Suppose I had been a dumb-bell, but an honest dumb-bell. Suppose I thought those horses were wild, and took some of 'em. And they got me for horse stealing. Up I'd go for life, wouldn't I, Bart? That's the trick you had in mind—a trick like that on a stranger—for a few measly dollars, to say nothing of the shady killings you've pulled. Well, here's your chance, Bart. I wanted to give you some kind of a chance, and your gag about wild horses put Firewater into my head. We'll let the two killers fight it out—Firewater and Bart Booker."

Bart Booker was terrified of that cantankerous roan horse. The animal was known far and wide in the Prairie City region, and Andy Saylor kept him as a curiosity. He was that rare specimen—the unbreakable. You might kill him, but you couldn't ride him. He led as docilely as a cow, but the instant he felt a man on his back——

"Come on, Bart. There's a stump right there. Throw a leg over Firewater. He's ground-hobbled. He can't do much but twist his back till I cut the hobbles."

At gun point, Grant Standish forced Bart Booker to obey.

Standish had another rope ready, and with it he tied Bart Booker's feet under Firewater's belly—tied them tight. Bart must subdue Firewater or die. He couldn't roll off and away from the awful hoofs. Firewater, when Bart sat

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astride, turned his wicked eyes as far around as the tether would permit. He was a cunning animal, and seemed to know by the feel of the hobbles that it was not yet time to get into action.

Bart Booker's lips spouted pleas for mercy, while Grant Standish grimly bound his feet. Grant kept his mind on his two dead brothers. He took the snaffle rope off Bart's wrists and slipped the reins into his hands.

"It's up to you, Bart," he said. "I'm going to cut the hobbles. You've got to ride him. You can't slide off and away. You're up against a killer now, that's a match for you. Firewater ain't got no more conscience than you have. He's just as tricky. He——"

With his last words, Grant Standish cut Firewater's hobbles.

"If Firewater wins," he cried, "it's all over for you, Bart. If you win, ride him right on out of the country!"

He flicked the horse with the snaffle rope, and the fight was on.

Firewater won.

SICK PLANTS SHOULD GO TO THE DOCTOR

METHODS that have been found excellent when applied to human beings are often no less so when tried on plants and animals, and vice versa. When Mary or Jimmy looks pale and listless, the wise elder suggests a visit to the family physician who prescribes "a little of this and a little of that" to make pale cheeks rosy and weak limbs sturdy. Now the same thing can be done with plants. The tree surgeon is, of course, an established practitioner, and is often called in to save or operate on a tree; but the less vigorous growths may also have medical treatment as a result of a new discovery.

A member of the Purdue University Agricultural Experiment Station, Doctor G. N. Hoffer, has found that by pouring chemicals into the stalk of a corn plant he can decide by the colors that appear whether the plant needs potash, nitrogen, or phosphate. The doctor discovered the process when brown spots on a corn stalk turned red after thiocynate of potash had been poured into it. The potash had been used in an effort to determine what caused black specks in canned corn, and the telltale spots showed that the soil from which the plant grew had an unbalanced ration of plant food.

With the help of his discovery, the doctor hopes to perfect a balanced ration for corn which should result in bigger and better corn for Indiana.

ALASKAN BOYS AT WORK

FIFTY or sixty dollars may be considered a very high price for a boy's home-made sled. And yet those prices were recently commanded at a fair at Anchorage, Alaska. The exhibits were made and sold by native boys in the industrial school at Eklutna, Alaska, which is maintained by the United States bureau of education.

Snowshoes brought ten dollars a pair. And not only were all the exhibits of sleds and snowshoes sold, but orders for many more sales were also taken. Other exhibits at the fair included totem poles, hunting knives, and vegetables that the boys had raised. A seemingly more difficult exhibit was canned fish that had been caught and put up during the previous summer.

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The Drifter

By Harry R. Keller

CARSON drifted down from Silver City,
Pulled his bronc up at the Circle J;
Took a pack of "pasteboards" from his pocket;
Carson and the punchers sat at play.
Soon the waddies gathered round the table
Saw that hostile fate had surely struck;
For Lady Luck enthroned herself as ruler—
And Carson held the hands that held the luck.

His nimble fingers levied heavy tribute
From every puncher of the Circle J;
The evening waned, and still luck lingered with him;
He won their shirts, their socks, their monthly pay.
Buckaroo and wrangler, boss and cookie,
He cleaned them to the last thin dime—and then
Carson calmly gathered up his winnings,
Forked his bronc, and drifted out again.

Now, all this happened early in November,
Before the northers started in to roar;
And April came, and August, and September,
And brought no chance to even up the score.
The Circle J's high spirits drooped and withered,
And all the future loomed up drear and black
For any cherished hope of gaining vengeance—
And then one morning Carson drifted back.

Twilight came. A vengeful crew of cowboys
Rallied to renew the ancient fray.
But once again the luck abode with Carson;
The punchers' earnings dwindled fast away.
Then understanding broke, when on a rich trick
Carson slammed an ace, and slammed it hard;
For this was rather strange, when you consider
A Circle J man held the selfsame card.

So when they saw the wondrous "luck" of Carson
Depended solely on a double deal,
The Circle J arose in righteous anger,
And lamplight gleamed on guns of polished steel.
But the hand that turned the trick in dealing
Drew a .45 and plugged the light;
Carson smashed a window in the blackness,
Forked his bronc, and drifted out of sight.

And one can safely say the Circle J boys
Have learned a costly lesson they'll forget
When rattlers start to wearing red bandannas—
But Carson, I suppose, is drifting yet!

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Timber-r-r!

By Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Take 'Em by the Tail," etc.

EH! Heh!"

Chuckling with glee, "Dad" Simms sniffed the cold air sweeping over the rain-drenched forests of fir and cedar. On his way to Alaska he had taken a few days off to look up old friends in the various logging camps. As always, Dad was dressed for the occasion. Instead of the moccasins he wore so much in the North, his feet were covered with heavy boots, the thick soles of which were studded with sharp calks. Like most of the logging fraternity, Dad called them "cork boots." His "tin pants" were staggered. That is, the waterproof trousers he wore had been cut off at the bottoms so they would not catch in snags and trip him. He wore a heavy woolen shirt and a waterproof coat.

The logging road he was following had been there for years, and the ties were worn hollow by the passing of thousands of cork boots. The road twisted and turned as it followed the course of a brawling creek. Bridges were frequent. As Dad plodded along he recalled the changes in logging methods that he had lived to see. There were the old Mississippi River days when he had floated the logs downstream for days at a time. A logger was always wet. Then he had drifted to the Puget Sound country. The streams mostly were too swift for log driving. Railroads were used instead. Trees were dropped by the fallers, cut up by the buckers, and dragged to the loading platforms by cables. Later, cables were swung from treetop to treetop, and the logs carried through the air. This was the high-lead method. And now they were using skidders—great machines that could skid the logs

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through the brush to the railroad, then load them.

"About the only thing left that's familiar," Dad growled, "is the woodsy smell. That must be 'Bull' Sheridan's skidder up there." He blinked at a plume of white steam a hundred feet above him. The hiss of the exhaust as the engines labored, the boom of the logs as they bumped together or against objects, and the blast of the whistle as the whistle punk sent the signals came sharply. "Yeah," the old man muttered, "and one other thing is the same —loggers are always wet."

Before tackling the switchback that led to operations on the ridge, Dad turned aside and headed for a group of frame buildings covered with tarpaper. Water dripped steadily from the eaves. A cook-house cat hurried through the rain. "Probably got kittens cached away somewhere," Dad observed; "logging-camp cats always have kittens. Hello, there's the bull cook! All bull cooks are suspicious of strangers."

An elderly logger in worn clothing stood in the doorway of a building devoted to the sale of tobacco, candy, magazines, fishing tackle, and the numerous odds and ends a logger might need. Near by a number of pigs grunted comments on the wet weather. The bull cook was obviously dubious of Dad. "You're too old to work in the woods," he growled.

"Never saw a bull cook that wasn't soured on the world," Dad countered. "Besides, I ain't too old to clean you in a rough-and-tumble fight, Sam Tench, how are you?"

At this the other changed completely. "Sufferin' mackinaws, if it ain't old man Simms!"

"'Young man' Simms you mean," corrected Dad. He shook the bull cook's hand warmly. "How you makin' out?"

"I'm gettin' by. Make a little off the hawgs and chickens out there. Now and again I pick up an honest dime sellin' stuff to the boys. You're still hangin' on, I see. You ought to have been dead long ago. What you got agin' the undertaker?"

"Nothing in the world," Dad answered; "they're all right in their place, but their place ain't around such tough pine knots as us. How's Sheridan, anyway? Let's see, you've been with him thirty years now?"

"No, forty years. He's great." Then the bull cook lowered his voice. "But he takes his grief sorta hard. Outsiders don't know it so much as us old-timers who really know what a fine man's underneath Bull's tough old pelt."

"Grief, eh? You don't say!" exclaimed Dad. "You don't mean to say he lost his wife or that boy he's so proud of?"

"It's the boy," Sam Tench explained; "he's yaller."

"Yellow?"

"He's got a yaller streak a mile wide right down the middle of his back. And you can figger how that sets with a man like Bull what feared no man, because he'd licked the best of 'em; what feared no animal; and what didn't believe God wanted His people to be afraid of Him."

"Huh!" grunted Dad. "That's hard to believe! There's no yellow streak in the Sheridan family. Huh! It's sure got me guessing. I'm glad you told me. Otherwise, I might have made a break when I talked to Bull."

The old sour dough warmed his back as he talked. The sides of the heater were red-hot; the draft moaned as it was drawn up the chimney. Now and then the burning wood crackled sharply. Dad sniffed and caught the odor of drying socks and woolens. The very nature of logging and its surroundings bred only brave men. Always they are wet; always in danger of a flying cable, a falling tree, or a rolling log. It

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seemed incredible that Bull Sheridan of all men should have a yellow son.

Dad and the bull cook were thoughtful for nearly half an hour Now and then one or the other would bring up some incident of the early days, but mostly they were considering Bull Sheridan's feelings. "It must cut him like a knife to know that his son don't measure up," Dad observed.

"It does. He tries to keep it dark, but the men know."

"What's the kid doing?"

"He's a whistle punk."

"Mmmmm!" Dad exclaimed.

It was later that Sam Tench took Dad over to the cook house and introduced him to the cook as a friend of Sheridan's. "If I said you was a friend of mine," Tench confided, "he'd throw you out. You know how logging-camp cooks are—they can get away with murder."

Fortified by a cup of coffee, and warned by his talk with Sam, Dad headed up a winding trail to the scene of operations. Instinctively his eyes wandered to the whistle punk. He bulked large in spite of his distant position on a second ridge Dad eyed the huge drums and speeding cables for a moment, then, without disclosing his identity, the old sour dough worked his way down a steep bank, across a small canyon partly filled with débris, then up the other side to the whistle punk's station. For several minutes Dad was content to sit in the rain and catch his breath.

From this point he could witness the entire operation. A tree which had been topped nearly a hundred and fifty feet from the ground supported a network of guy wires, braces, and cables. A sky line ran from the tree, or gin pone, across the canyon to the second ridge, where it was secured to another tree. Logs were picked up, often several at a time, lifted in the air and drawn to the skidder, where they were dropped, to be again picked up and loaded on the cars a log at a time. It was a business of laboring men, taut cables, and much signaling on the whistle punk's part as the logs caught and were jerked free in the process of handling.

Dad gave the operations a brief glance, then studied the young whistle punk out of the corner of his eye. He was big for his eighteen years, and easily weighed a hundred and ninety pounds. There was much of Bull Sheridan's expression about the eyes, and there was Bull's fighting jaw. The youth's movements were those of one who must move quickly and surely if he is to escape with his life when danger threatens. In the woods there is scant time for second thought, and the first guess must be the correct one. His chest was deep and his shoulders broad. He so completely filled his coat that the buttons seemed to hold it together with difficulty.

"You're Jim Sheridan?" Dad presently said to him.

"That's my maiden name," the youth answered. His smile was winning and friendly—Bull Sheridan's smile when he was twenty.

"I'm Dad Simms," the old-timer announced. "I used to trot your father on my knee."

"You did?" Jim's eyes sparkled with interest. "Well, you'd have a tough time trotting him on your knee now. He's a two-hundred-and-twenty-five-pounder." Dad saw Jim's eyes change to an expression of wistfulness. For a moment he seemed to forget his surroundings. "Dad's a wonderful man. I think he's the nerviest man who ever worked in the woods. I wish I were like him. But—I'm not!"

Two hundred yards away a hoarse voice bawled, "Timberrrrr!"

Dad turned quickly. The top of a great tree was moving slowly against the sky line. Again came the sharp

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crack of the rending of sound wood. Fibers were stretched and snapped; the living tree groaned in its agony. Then came a new sound—the crackle of crumpling smaller trees in the giant's path; the swish of the green top through the air; the dull boom as the trunk struck and partly buried itself in the wet earth. Then silence except for the soft rushing of the wind through thousands of treetops.

The buckers began cutting the log into sections with their cross-cut saws, and presently the wire chokers would steal through the brush to drag the logs forth. On and on the business would go until all but the unfit trees had been taken and only stumps, débris, and naked creeks lay behind.

"And they say he's yellow," Dad muttered, "though bred to this! Huh! It ain't natural, and I'm going to hang around here until I find out the reason. That husky cub up there isn't yellow. Hello! There's Bull right now."

Bull Sheridan saw Dad almost at the same moment and recognized him. With a leap he was atop a log, running its length, never once losing his balance, nor pausing, even though the end narrowed until it was but three inches in diameter. He lifted Dad up by the elbows, put him down, and hugged him.

"You're a sight for the gods, Dad!" Bull rumbled. "Every now and then I read of you passing through Seattle on your way south or north, and I promised myself that if ever I got my hands on you, you'd have a tough time getting away from me." He turned to his son. "Jim, this is my old friend, Dad Simms! He took me on my first log drive down Old Man River fifty years ago."

Recalling what Sam Tench had said, it was easy for Dad to see a certain restraint in the relationship between father and son. There had been dramatic moments in their relationship that each was trying to forget, but never could. "I've met Mr. Simms already," Jim answered. Then he turned his attention to the signals.

Bull Sheridan threw a great arm across Dad's thin shoulders. "I'm calling it a day right now. We're going down to the shack for a visit. If this organization can't run without me for an hour or so it's a heck of an organization."

"Jim's on the job, isn't he?" Dad suggested. "You always said any boy of yours would be a logger from the ground up."

A shade passed swiftly across Bull Sheridan's face. "Jim's young," was all he said. Then half to himself he added: "I should clear out for a spell."

Dad's shrewd eyes saw in Bull Sheridan a man who had worked too long without a vacation Despite his tremendous strength, he was tired. He gave the younger man a sympathetic pat. "Bull, why don't you clear out? You can't fool me. You're a tired man right now."

There was method in Dad's words and actions. He knew the man that lay under Bull Sheridan's tough pelt, and that was the man he wanted to reach. Dad never pried into another's affairs unless he felt he could do that other a good turn.

Bull Sheridan seated himself on a log that had rolled from a passing truck. "Dad, fifty years ago, when I was a boy of ten, we were floating down the Mississippi. I fell in, and you pulled me out. I've been wet ever since. I'd like to go down to California, where the wife is, sit in the sunshine, dry out, and stay dry. I don't know what it's like to be dry except in the summer."

"Why don't you go, then? Jim can manage, and the experience will do him good."

Bull seemed about to pour forth the whole story to his old friend Then with an effort he checked himself. His pride would not permit it. He merely

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said: "Jim's learning the game. He was born within sound of a yarder's whistle; cut his teeth on a peavy, and played horse with a double-bitted ax. Yeah—he's learning." He smiled at Dad, a tragic, forced smile. "Remember the spring of '82, when you——" And so he talked, hurriedly, of various incidents of the early days, giving Dad no chance to speak of the present.

It was hours later that Dad found himself again with the bull cook. Bull Sheridan had excused himself on the plea that he had some matters to attend to.

Sam Tench shot Dad a queer glance. "What do you think of Bull's cub?" he asked.

"I don't think he's yellow," Dad answered.

"Huh! Then you're the only man what don't!" Sam paused to stuff the stove with pitch wood. Smoke, thick, black, and stifling, rolled into the room before he closed the door. "Whatcha goin' to do about it?"

Dad dodged a direct answer by asking: "What is there to do?"

The other did not reply. But Dad knew he was going to remain on the job until something had been done. Old Bull Sheridan needed a rest before his great body became a mere shell. Jim Sheridan was the man to step into his shoes. When Dad grew tired of the bull cook's hard-luck stories he headed back for Sheridan's. Near the cottage he picked up the patter of Bull's calks in the wet earth and followed. "Don't want to miss any excitement," he muttered. "Wind ain't blowing, and Bull might figure to top a tree."

The tracks led down a game trail to an opening in the woods. Dad hastily dodged behind a cedar and wondered what to do next. "Father and son facing each other with clenched hands," he muttered. "It's got to be stopped."

Bull Sheridan's voice came to him distinctly: "Son, you know I love you. You know I'd die for you, if it would do any good. And I guess you know my pride?"

"Yes."

"Well, Jim, I can stand what the boys in the woods think of you. I've learned to stand it. But I'll not have you stand before my old friend as a man who is afraid. To-morrow you're going to top that big fir on the ridge. I promised him you'd do it."

Jim Sheridan was breathing hard. Dad could see a tremendous struggle going on within him. The youth's face betrayed it. He wanted to obey his father, and yet some fear that was greater than pride, greater than love, possessed him. Almost in appeal he stretched out his hands. "We've gone over all this before, Dad," he groaned. "I can't do it!"

Bull Sheridan's face changed slowly from the purple of rage to the ashen tint of a man who is stirred to his depths. Slowly he shed his mackinaw and rolled up his sleeves. "Jim Sheridan," he panted, "you're going to take the beating of your life."

"I'll take it, but I won't climb a tree," the son answered. "And, father, I'm not going to hit back." He groaned. "I know how you feel about it all, and sometimes knowing it almost forces me to go ahead. Then—well, you've never known fear. And you can't understand. It must be great not to fear anything."

Sheridan did not answer. He continued to roll his sleeves, exposing his powerful arms.

"I'll tell you what, dad," the younger man continued, addressing his father: "I won't fight you. But I'll take on any man in camp."

"I can whip any man in camp," Sheridan declared. "You're taking a beating from the best man in these parts. And you're going to have fear driven out of you with naked fists. Come on!"

"You come," Jim countered.

As Bull Sheridan rushed into the

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fight, Dad Simms ran down the slope "Bull, this sorta thing will kinda spoil my visit," he said in a kindly tone. "I don't want to see a tree topped if it's going to cause bad feeling. You see, Bull, there's so danged many things we don't know, no matter how long we live. And what causes fear is one of 'em. Logging and mining make a man go after things rough-shod. You tear down a mountain or mow down a forest to get what you want. In the old days you used to drag half the country up horsing the logs to the cars by main strength. Now you use high leads and the like of that. Jim, shake your dad's hand and run along to the house. You forgive him, don't you?"

"There's never been anything to forgive, Mr. Simms. I understand his viewpoint. And, if anybody should ask you, it's not the easiest thing in the world to work day after day with men when you know how badly they think of you." He gripped his father's hand warmly. His left hand dropped on the broad shoulder. It was wet with rain, but the heat of Bull's body was sending up a faint cloud of steam. "I'm sorry, dad, I don't measure—up," said the boy.

He vanished into the thick timber almost instantly. Dad and Bull walked slowly down the game trail, Dad leading, Bull trailing.

"I tried to keep this from you," Bull said presently. "My pride, you see, is hurt. What a boy he'd make, Dad, if it wasn't for that one thing! That's why I hang on year after year. The wife can't stand the wet winters. I should be with her. We've both worked hard to create this business. And now I can't let go." He pounded the next sentence home with his fist striking the palm of his hand. "And Jim Sheridan nor any other man can't run the sort of crews I have unless he has their respect. Bull Sheridan's son has to stand on his own legs, in the woods—he can't stand on Bull Sheridan's."

"Let's get at the bottom of this fear," suggested Dad.

"What's there to get at?"

"That's it. You've never thought there was a reason for it."

"As I said before, Dad, the kid was born in the timber; grew up with it; never left it except when he was five years old. That was the year I fell from a tree and broke both legs and both ankles. I went to Seattle to get the best treatment possible, and they came along, too, Jim and his mother. When I was up and about, they went on East to visit relatives. They stayed two years. My wife's mother wasn't in very good shape, and I was knocking around from camp to camp, anyway.

"They came back when Jim was seven. I'll never forget the first tree I topped. I took the boy out to give him a thrill. And he stood there, screaming like an insane person, throwing himself on the ground." Bull Sheridan's jaw set. "The loggers laughed, and I went ahead and finished the job. He was sick for two days afterward. And I told myself I didn't care, but I lied."

"The poor little cuss," Dad said softly. "Well, Bull. After that the lad continued to be afraid, eh?"

"How'd you know?"

"It couldn't be otherwise, Bull. You see, children have a great admiration for their fathers. No matter how humble a job a man may have, his little boy isn't ashamed of him. For which, thank goodness! And their love is tremendous. It was the thought that you would fall and be hurt that frightened the boy. He had seen you fall when he was five years old. Nothing could have made a greater impression than seeing you drop, then being picked up, broken and helpless, to be carried away to a hospital."

They walked on in silence. Bull's head was bowed in thought. His mind was skimming the high spots of the years. Each footstep brought a sucking

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sound from the mud to remind him that he had always been wet and probably always would be. They had neared the cottage when the big man stopped abruptly. He threw his arm across Dad's shoulder. "Thanks, Dad. Now I know it's something beyond the boy. I guess I don't care what the world thinks. I never have. Dad, isn't he a great boy?"

"He sure is," Dad agreed.

They stopped with one foot on the bottom step. "Dad," and Dad Simms knew the question was born of deep hope, "have you ever heard of such a fear being conquered?"

"Yes. But not often."

It was apparent the big man grasped the faint thread of hope Dad's answer held forth. "How?"

"Oh! When some great emergency took place. In that hour the man forgot his fear and did the things he was afraid to do. Then, having done them, he was no longer afraid." Dad turned the big man around and looked him squarely in the eyes. "Now, Bull, no risking your life and limb to test that boy out. You know, he might fail, and it would be worse than ever. For you and for him."

"That's so. Let's change the subject and go in."

The following day Dad Simms saw Bull Sheridan top a tree and rig it. With the aid of the engines the cables were hauled to the top of the tree and operations continued on the same side, but farther down the line. As before, the logs were taken in mid-air across a deep gulch. Bull gave directions for the falling of a fir tree six feet through at the butt in order that Dad could see just what his crew and outfit could actually do.

The morning of the second day found Dad Simms standing at the base of the big fir. In its lifetime the American nation had been born, the Civil War fought, the spruce that had grown near it had gone into World War airplanes. It had taken centuries to create it. Man was falling it in a matter of hours. A deep undercut had been made. The fallers were standing on platforms above the ground dragging a saw back and forth. The keen teeth had eaten deep into the heart of the tree. Each outward movement brought its quota of clean, sound sawdust. It fell on the moss that had taken ages to form. Occasionally, the tree groaned inwardly. The fallers paused and removed pitch from the saw. One of them cocked an alert eye at the undercut. His problem was to drop the tree between two others without breaking them or shattering the big tree. He offered to bet Dad Simms he could drop the tree on his hat. Dad refused to take the bet, but promised a box of cigars instead. The faller drove a wedge in at a certain angle to aid in pitching the tree in the desired direction. He bit off a chew of what he called "eatin' tobacco," and, then continued to work.

Suddenly came the cry, "Timberrrr!" The giant crashed to earth and the ground shook from the impact. The buckers were on hand to cut it into the desired lengths.

"Lively, boys!" Bull yelled. "We want to show this man what we can do in a hurry. You fallers lay off the rest of the day. There's a stiff wind coming up. It might stop you from droppin' 'em where you want to.'

A choker cable went around one end of the butt cut as soon as it was off. "It's going to take some fine work to handle that baby and not snap a few cables," Bull observed. "It's in a tight place. Well, Jim's handling the whistle." He jerked his thumb toward Jim Sheridan, who had taken a position well to the right where he could observe operations. A button pressed completed an electric circuit that blew the whistle. The cables strained at the signal, and

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the slack was taken up. Guy wires grew tense. Men stood clear.

"Get over there, Dad! If a cable should carry away——"

Dad scrambled to a position of safety. He had once seen a man broken in two by being caught in the bight of the line. Bull ran down the slope, saying something about a brace that was secured to a stump. The wind came in a sharp gust and Dad saw a branch snap off and carry away. The tops began swaying, and it was easy to understand why the high-climbers and high-riggers refused to work in the wind.

The whistle was blasting continuously as the cables pulled or slacked away. Every guy wire was trembling from the strain. The sky line sagged badly. One end of the log swung around and knocked a stump out. Slowly it began to move. The whistle blasted sharply and the log swung downward. It was out of view of the man at the drum levers. He relied on the whistle punk for orders. Suddenly the whistle blasted frantically. There was no telling from the confusion of signals what was desired. "Jim Sheridan's lost his head!" the man growled. Then the engine raced as the load was lifted. A cable leaped into the air. The whole network waved violently. Dad Simms yelled a warning. The log had struck a small hill on the slope and broken away. It was now rolling downward, smashing everything that happened to be before it.

Just ahead, squarely in the path, Bull Sheridan raced for his life. He leaped between two stumps, landed on a six-inch log, then leaped again. As he struck he fell. The stumps were knocked clear, the six-inch log crushed like a bit of matchwood. Dad Simms turned his head away.

Jim Sheridan clenched his hands and groaned. Then he raced down the slope. "I gave the wrong signal and caught him! Ohhhh!" The cry came from the depths of his being. "I've killed my own father! What a creature I am!"

Bull Sheridan lay half buried in the muck. His legs from the hips down were somewhere under the log. His face was ashen from pain. "It's all right, son," he gasped; "get me out of here. Handle it your own way. The men are stunned!"

For a moment Jim Sheridan stood there as though stunned, too. But his eyes were taking in the situation.

"Get a couple of cables around that log!" he ordered. "We've got to lift it clear. No, you can't dig him out. The water will run in and he'll drown. Wait a minute. If we pull from that angle, it'll drag instead of lift clear. We've got to lift straight up!"

Every logger in hearing looked to the opposite side of the ridge. The answer lay in the fir tree. A cable from that would enable them to lift the log straight up. But some one had first to climb that tree and rig a cable, then brace the tree itself lest the strain carry it away and drop the log back again.

Jim shot an order at a surprised logger. "Get the climbing irons; dad's saw and ax. Take 'em to that tree. The rest of you boys get busy with a cable. You know what's got to be done. I'll top her and rig her. We can't take chances." Next he dropped to his father's side. "Can you hold out, dad?"

"Guess I'll have to, son. Don't worry about me. Dad, come here!"

Dad Simms leaped to respond. "Yes, Bull."

"Reach in my pocket, get my pipe, fill it, and light it for me." As Dad obeyed, a terrible groan came from the man's lips. And no man before had ever heard Bull Sheridan groan. The log settled. Dad placed the pipe between Sheridan's lips. The next instant he had bitten the stem in two.

"Is it that bad, Bull?"

"Yes. Bottom's filled with débris.

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When I strike a bit of sunken timber, I'm crushed until it breaks. Sometimes it feels as if something inside of me would burst." Again it came. And Dad Simms wanted to cry. Bull Sheridan rolled his eyes around. "Look, Dad. The wind! Say! Stop that boy! He can't top that tree in a wind like this. He knows it. Tell 'em to take a chance on dragging it off."

A logger raced to obey the command. No man questioned Bull Sheridan's orders in the woods. That is, no man did until that hour. Then Jim Sheridan ignored the command. His safety rope was already around the tree; his spikes were digging into the rough bark.

Bull Sheridan cupped his hands and bellowed a command to stop. The wind carried his voice aside, and the storm in the treetops laughed at him. He twisted and turned, trying to pull himself free by main strength. "Hook a cable onto me and drag me out," he snarled. "Don't let that boy go up there." He swore with feeling. "I didn't think it'd end like this." Pain spread over his face again. The log sank farther as something deep in the mud gave way. Ooze was spreading over Bull Sheridan's thighs now.

Tragedy seemed to hover over the scene. Tragedy for the man in the mud; tragedy for his son moving slowly up the big fir on the ridge.

"Dad! Come here! Listen! The kid thinks he made a mistake. When it's all over, if I die, just tell him he didn't make a mistake. I framed him. I tapped the wire leading to the whistle and changed the signal. You said, Dad, a great crisis might kill his fear, and I tried to bring about the crisis. I figured I could drop into that hollow spot between the two stumps way up there. I figured the block might foul and he'd have to go up to clear it. I didn't figure on the weight of the log. Dad——" Again pain caused Bull to set his teeth. "I did the job too well. If I die, tell him. If I don't—— Ah! Dad, look up there! That's my boy. See, he's doing just as I trained him. He ought to stop now, look down, falter, and quit. He's about that high. Man! Man! That old tree's swaying. Look! He's reached the first limb. Look out, son, that branch doesn't swish around and hit you! It weighs a thousand pounds and—— It's off! Somebody stop him!"

"They can't stop him," Dad said. "They've tried it."

"Ah! I can stand the pain for such a boy. Just as cool! Dad, I owe you everything. I didn't know, you see. Just tried bull strength. That's what they call me—Bull. Never think, just use my strength. What a lad! Worth dying for! And I bungled the job. Sent him to his death. If that tree should split as the top kicks back—— That top weighs a ton. Just think! A ton supported a hundred and fifty feet from the ground on a narrow pole! And the wind blowing. Look, he's working like mad!"

Tense and drawn, the big man watched the operation. He knew exactly what each gust of wind meant. The top would go sooner than it should. The tree might split. The spar might shake Jim's spikes out. He would drop until the rope caught and crushed him against the tree.

"There it goes! Look out, lad! She's split—— No!"

Bull groaned in anguish, but it was for the boy and not for himself. As the spar, released of the weight, kicked back, Jim's boots were seen to toss clear. Instantly he tried to dig them in, but the vibrating spar tree shook him furiously, then dropped him. Thirty feet he shot downward before the rope caught on the bark. Then he was smashed against the side, to hang helplessly, head rolled back, arms hanging limply. High above, the imps of the storm screamed their glee.

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Bull Sheridan's great hands tore at the log holding him down. "I've got to get out! I've got to get out!" He cursed every man within hearing. "Drag this off me! Drag me out! I can stand it. I've got to get up there. No man among you can let him down. It's a stiff job." Again he cursed the men and lastly himself for causing it all.

With a groan of defeat he lay panting, watching. The head of the high-hung figure straightened and looked about. With a mighty effort the arms caught the rope; the spikes dug in. Then Jim Sheridan went up to finish the job—not down. A roar of approval came from hoarse throats.

"That's my boy they're cheering. My boy! No man in the woods is better than Bull Sheridan's boy—not even Bull Sheridan." The log sank slightly at one end. Mud and water shot upward, and life seemed to go from Bull Sheridan. "My boy's worth a man's dying for, Dad. A man takes Bull Sheridan's—place."

Dad watched Jim Sheridan complete his job. He swayed as he removed the irons from his boots. His hand frequently went to his ribs.

"Broken ribs," somebody muttered.

Jim breathed sharply, as though it hurt. His face was smeared crimson where cheek and nose had been dragged against the bark as he dropped.

He looked down at his father, then at Dad. "Dead?" he questioned.

"Still breathing," Dad answered, fearing the worst.

Jim Sheridan regained his self-control with an effort. He reached for the whistle control and slowly tightened the lines. Again the network grew tense from the strain. The fireman was stuffing the firebox with dry slabs of pitch. Steam was popping from the safety valve. The great log left the mud with a sucking sound. Muck dripped in a stream onto Bull Sheridan's face as the log was swung clear.

Jim knelt by his father's side. His frame shook from his sobbing. "I found myself too late! Too late I won over fear! The price to pay was too much. Oh, dad!"

The father's lips stirred. "Weight's gone! I can breathe. Hello, son! I'm wet and cold. Goin' down to California to dry out. Got a man to run the camp." He smiled up as no man had ever seen Bull Sheridan smile at his son. It was something like the smile of a young mother looking at a baby. But no man laughed, for each man understood.

Dam Simms chuckled softly: "Heh! Heh!" Then he cut the extension Bull had spliced to the signal wire, carefully taped the spot, then rubbed it in the mud, so no man would know. He slapped a wet knee as rheumatism gave him a sharp twinge. Growling, he headed for the bull cook's stove. It seemed like a man was always wet in the woods.

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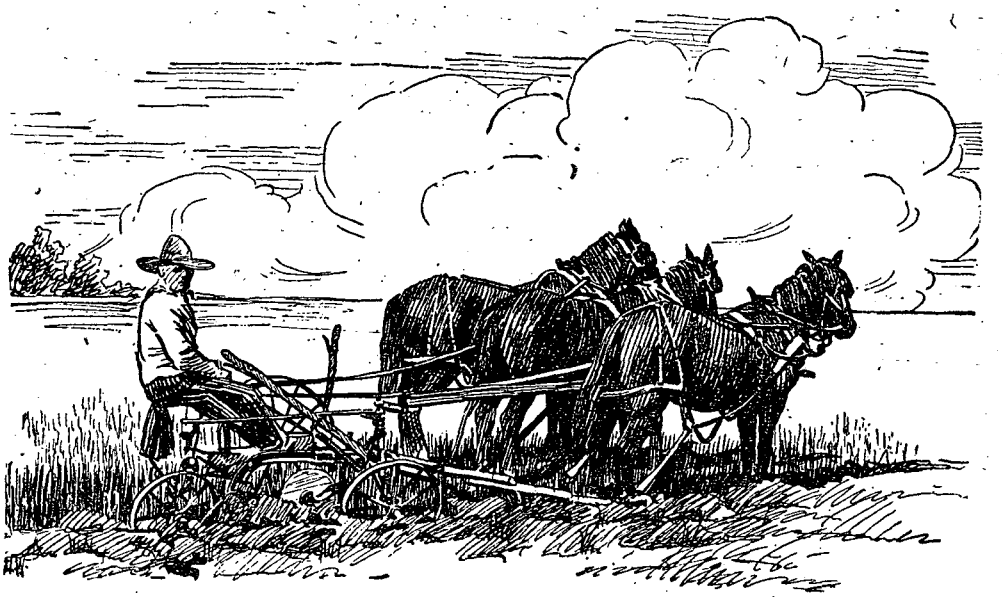

Pioneer Towns of the West

By Duane Clark

(Hastings, Nebraska)

HASTINGS ranks fourth in size in the State of Nebraska, having a population of over sixteen thousand. It is located in the southeastern part of the State, in Adams County.

Living conditions are ideal in Hastings, it having many of the advantages of larger cities with few of their disadvantages. If one wishes to build a home, there are delightful sites to choose from; or if one desires to rent or buy, there is no lack of prospects.

One of the outstanding and unusual features of Hastings is its freedom from noisy, clanging street cars. Every home is said to be within walking distance of the business section. Over splendid highways, buses travel from Hastings to Grand Island, Kearney, Superior, Crete, Lincoln, Holdrege, and intermediate points. Eleven of these vehicles depart and return every day. All buses are the latest-type parlor coaches, carrying passengers, baggage, and express.

Hastings' climate is delightful, being nineteen hundred and twenty feet above sea level. Coöl breezes continually blow across great stretches of grain lands and produce an atmosphere which has a relatively high humidity. Hailstorms, which often destroy crops in the Middle West, are particularly infrequent in Hastings and Adams County, due to their position. The health records of this section are well above average for the United States.

The stores of Hastings are large, convenient, and up to date. For amuse-

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ment there are three high-grade moving-picture theaters, an opera house, a municipal auditorium, a country club and golf links, tennis courts, an amusement park and swimming pool, four large public parks, ballrooms, clubrooms, and gymnasium. Along paved and good gravel roads many beautiful drives may be enjoyed.

The foundation of Hastings' wealth and present standards of living is its splendid agricultural facilities. It is the predominant factor in business and the largest single contributor of wealth.

In the territory surrounding Hastings the greatest yield is corn; then come fall wheat, dairy cattle, oats, swine, alfalfa, poultry and eggs, barley, beef cattle, potatoes, spring wheat, and rye. For the prospective farmer, land values are said to be excellent for investment in that section. Because of the fine soil and temperate climate violent fluctuations are avoided.

The Hastings stockyards are a community enterprise organized for the purpose of providing the city and its territory with sales yards for live stock. It is believed that the feeding and raising of more live stock in central and southern Nebraska will be encouraged by the installation of this new institution. The small farmer and ranchman is now able to secure his live stock in small numbers.

In number and volume of manufactured goods, Hastings ranks third in the State. Hastings has the largest cigar factory in the central States west of Chicago. Also, it has the largest exclusive tire-pump factory in the United States, as well as the largest luggage-carrier factory. Hastings has four brickyards and makes seventy per cent of all brick in Nebraska. It is the home of one of the largest harness factories in the country, which uses twenty thousand sides of leather annually. Other manufactories are a large and modern candy factory, three bakeries, a farm-implement factory making land rollers, windmills, hay machinery, et cetera, a metal-products factory specializing in grain bins, besides many others specializing in certain lines.

Besides these, Hastings has five printing establishments, a daily newspaper having a large circulation, and a weekly. Over four million dollars' worth of goods made at Hastings are shipped from there annually throughout the United States and to some foreign countries.

What makes Hastings an ideal distribution center is its location, which is almost in the exact center of the United States. It has ample railroad facilities, being served by the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, the Chicago & Northwestern, the Missouri Pacific, St. Joe & Grand Island, and the Union Pacific railroads, besides having good connections with other lines. The city also excels as a distributing center because, in most lines of merchandise, there are no large distributors within a hundred miles east and south of the city and none within two hundred miles north and four hundred miles west of it.

Highways radiating from Hastings are the D. L. D., Harding, Columbia, Old Oregon Trail, Grainland, and Potash, having good, hard-surfaced roads. Shipping by truck along these thoroughfares is becoming increasingly popular.

Hastings has an unusually large retail-trading area, and its stores maintain a high standard. Total retail sales exceed eight million nine hundred thousand dollars annually.

Among the financial institutions are the First National Bank, Nebraska National Bank, Exchange National Bank, State Bank of Hastings, Bank of Commerce, and the Clarke-Buchanan Co. Investments.

The city water system was installed in 1886, the result of bond issues

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amounting to one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars. Four years later the electric light and power system came into service. Water is now obtained from artesian wells, and with the present pumping equipment an unlimited supply of pure water and ample reserve is supplied at all times. One of the noticeable features of the city is an ornamental lighting system of three hundred electrolier posts, in addition to over six hundred lights distributed through the streets of the residential district. Hastings is considered the best-lighted city of its class in Nebraska. The Central Power Co. serves Hastings with gas. The plant is modern and efficient and supplies other cities also.

The city is governed by a mayor and eight councilmen. Proof of the soundness of its business policies and selection of officers is evidenced by the many beautiful buildings, parks, extensive paving, and low tax rate to the home owners.

Hastings has a million-dollar public-school system of the highest order, five grade schools, two high schools, a large parochial school, a Catholic academy, a business college, and a Presbyterian college, with a splendid system employed throughout. The educational work requires the services of one hundred teachers, principals, and supervisors. The Hastings Business College was organized in 1887 and continues to graduate its hundreds of men and women.

There are twenty-six churches in Hastings. This is also a fine medical center. The Mary Lanning Memorial Hospital was built by Mr. and Mrs. Lanning in memory of their daughter. It is modern in every detail. Among the buildings attached is a spacious nurses' home. The Nebraska Sanitarium was built in 1908 by the Seventh Day Adventists. The institution specialies in electrotherapy and hydrotherapy. The Glasco Hospital is also located in Hastings, and two miles west is the State Hospital for the Insane, the largest institution of its kind in Nebraska.

Dwellings in Hastings are many and beautiful, each homemaker seeming to take especial pride in the care of his house and lawns. A tour of the residential section is worth the time. Hastings also has a fine municipal tourist camping ground, one of the best known in the West. Most attractive are the buildings of the Hastings Country Club and the Sunnyside Home for the aged.

Hastings has an excellent radio broadcasting station. Station KFKX holds the record for mail received the first week of its operation, when nineteen hundred and sixty-three letters arrived.

LENGTHENING OF THE CANADIAN PACIFIC LINES

IT was recently announced by the vice president of the Western Lines that during the past summer the Canadian Pacific had built more than three hundred and twenty miles of new branch lines, with seventy-one new stations and shipping points. By this means hundreds of farmers have been brought much nearer to transportation facilities and thousands of acres of rich agricultural land have been made more attractive to the prospective settler.

As a result of the rapidity with which the construction program has gone forward, a large proportion of this year's crop is being marketed over the new trackage. Settlement rapidly followed the laying of steel, and many towns are springing up around the newly erected country elevators already built or in the course of construction.

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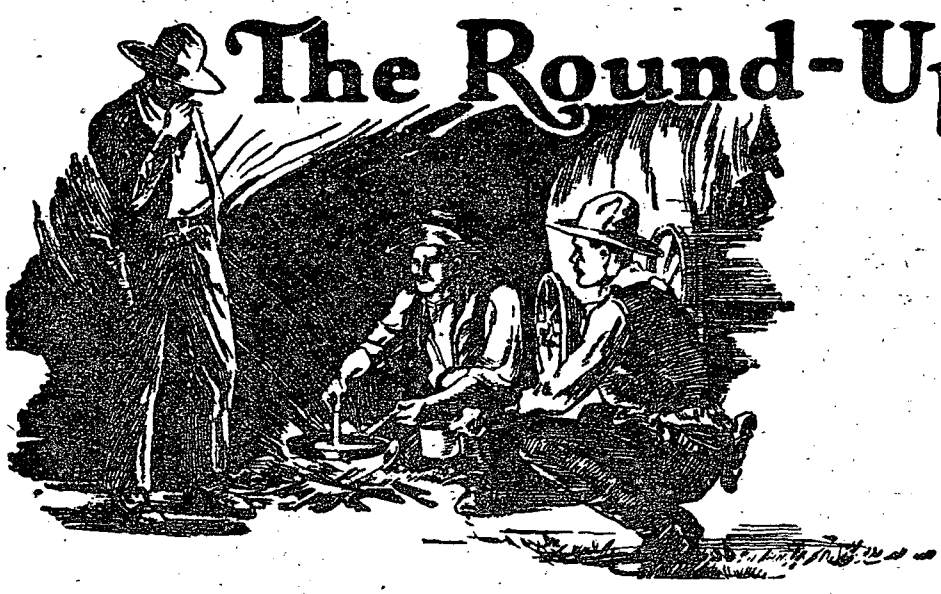
The Round-Up



SEEMS like the Round-up this week is goin' to be a kind of "this-is-the-way-I-feel-about-it" meetin'. You see, we've received so many letters from Folks as couldn't attend, that it seems only right, proper, and polite that we should read some of 'em.

Then stir up the fire, "Red," so we can make out what all these here Folks has got to say. While Red's doin' that, we'll wipe off our specs and make ready. All set! Here goes:

"HELLO, BOSS AND FOLKS: I'm only twelve years old, but, just the same, I'd like to have my say about the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

"Well, I've been reading this magazine for about a year and a half, and I think none of the other magazines can compare with it.

"For instance, Cherry Wilson's 'Stormy Dorn' was certainly good. Also, Max Brand's Duster and Geraldi stories were humdingers. Tell Seth Ranger his 'Bud' Tuttle stories are good, too.

"But I still say that Cherry can't be beat. Three cheers to her and all the writers, and the same for this magazine!

"So long! CHARLES PENN.

"37 Waverly Avenue, Garrett Park, Maryland."

"DEAR BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP: We have been constant readers of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for the past six or seven years, and enjoy no magazine quite as much as this one. Cherry Wilson and Robert Ormond Case are our favorites.

"I have a request to make. Do you suppose any one has the words to the song 'Billy Venaro'? It starts, I think:

> "'Billy Venaro heard them say,
> In an Arizona town one day,
> That a band of Apache Indians
> Were on the trail of death!'"

"I would be real glad to get this, as I am making a scrap book of old frontier songs. Sincerely yours,

"MRS. J. L. RAMSELL.

"R. F. D. 2, Bolivar, New York.

"P. S.: Inclosed you will find my renewal to the WESTERN STORY for six months."

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"BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP AND FOLKS: I believe I have been reading the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE ever since it started. There is none better for me.

"I was born and raised in the old West, which is a part of the West at present. I was born in old Nebraska in the year 1873. So, you see, she was only a pup at that time. Might say we grew up together.

"Now just a few words in regard to the stories and the writers. My favorites are Cherry Wilson and Robert Ormond Case. I have read quite a bit about the 'superman' stories. And, while I am free to admit they are good, I cannot say I really am in love with them. For my part, I think the real, honest-to-goodness he-man and the real, honest-to-goodness women are the right dope for a story.

"Wishing the WESTERN all the success it deserves, and that is much, I remain, as ever, Yours,

"C. F. FOLDEN.

"1721 Avenue C, Scottsbluff, Nebraska."

"EVENING, BOSS AND FOLKS: I have been a constant reader of WESTERN STORY and will say it's the best Western story published. I read it from cover to cover and then put it in the bookcase where I keep only WESTERN STORY MAGAZINES.

"I have just finished looking over twelve past editions of WESTERN STORY, where Frank Richardson Pierce is the outstanding author, the others all tying for second place.

"This is the first letter I have ever written to the Round-up, and sure would like to see it printed there.

"I remain, a contented reader of WESTERN STORY,

"JOHN DOREMUS.

"965 Third Avenue, College Point, New York.

"P. S.: Best wishes to all WESTERN STORY authors."

"DEAR BOSS: Tell the cook to stir up his pan of blessings so that there will be no lumps in it for 1930. We would like, all of us, to feel the smoothness of a perfect year. Seems as though 1930 holds for us great things, and WESTERN STORY will be one of them.

"And thank you much for the Round-up speech on Christ and two others who loved their fellow men enough to give their lives for them. We shall never forget them. They mean too much to allow their memory to slip casually by, and I hope their blessing is upon every happy, carefree, breezy page of WESTERN STORY and her sister publications, and upon those who labor to produce them.

"The Christmas issue of WESTERN STORY was all that it was meant to be, and then some. Every bit was good!

"I want to thank Cherry Wilson for her 'Lonesome Santa Claus.' Another vivid demonstration of her power to build wild, vital, throbbing life into her stories, to depict the suffering, sobs, laughter, love, and the sweet spirit of Christmas that pervades her gift to that greatly commemorated day when the world first knew the spirit of human love, of giving.

"If there is any one who has read 'Lonesome Santa Claus,' and has failed to hear the faint music of the angels in heaven while they read, I despair for them! For the callousness of their souls have they failed to hear it! Every word is a note of grace and beauty! A modern parable of human sacrifice on the altar of love. No one with a soul less full of love could have revealed this touching picture of hate, love, and giving.

"I wish to congratulate the editor on his discriminating choice of top-hand writers such as Cherry Wilson.

"Yours for a golden 1930,

"CLAUDE R. MEACHAM.

"Prescott, Arizona."

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"DEAR BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP: Have just finished reading WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE of January 18th, and I just can't keep still any longer. I have been reading WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for ten years or more and like it very much. Peter Henry Morland and Walt Coburn are top hands in Colorado and South Dakota.

"But what I wanted to report, Boss, was this: I have been hearing about antelopes run down with horses, and I just wanted to know where those said horses came from. I have ridden all kinds of cow ponies and race horses on the range and on the track. I used to ride a relay string at the fairs all over Colorado, and want to say that I don't think the horse has been foaled yet that can get within roping distance of an antelope. And, furthermore, I will help back up William L. Chastain of Utah with anybody who says they can. Do I hear any coin rattle? Well, I got that off my chest, Boss, so I will be riding on. H. S., EX-WADDIE.

"Seattle, Washington."

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I have been a reader of this magazine for some time, and, believe me, it tops anything I have read yet. I have just finished a good story by Seth Ranger, 'White Water,' and expect to see more like it.

"This guy Ormond Case sure knew what I liked when he wrote 'The Yukon Drive.' Well, get busy and send in some more like that. Also, I look forward every week to see a yarn by Ray Humphreys; and, to put it right, they are all good, and may they be forever the best—clean and wholesome stories that the one and only magazine can publish. Long live WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE! JULIAN DE WOLF.

"4 Cypress Street, Watertown, New York."

Will we sing a good old Western song? We will! And it will be:

THE LONE BUFFALO HUNTER.

It's of those Texas cowboys a story I'll tell;
No name I will mention, though in Texas they do dwell.
Go find them where you will, they are all so very brave,
And when in good society they seldom misbehave.

When the fall work is all over, in the line camp they'll be found,
For they have to ride those lonesome lines the long winter round;
They prove loyal to a comrade, no matter what's to do;
And when in love with a fair one they seldom prove untrue.

But springtime comes at last and finds them glad and gay;
They ride out to the round-up about the first of May;
About the first of August they start up the trail,
They have to stay with the cattle, no matter rain or hail.

But when they get to the shipping point, then they receive their tens,
Straightway to the barroom and gently blow them in;
It's the height of their ambition, so I've been truly told,
To ride good horses and saddles and spend the silver and gold.

Those last two things I've mentioned, it is their heart's desire,
And when they leave the shipping point their eyes are like balls of fire;
It's of those fighting cattle they seem to have no fear;
A-riding bucking bronchos off is their heart's desire.

They will ride into the branding pen, a rope within their hands;
They will catch them by each forefoot and bring them to the sands;
It's altogether in practice, with a little bit of sleight,
A-roping Texas cattle—it is their heart's delight.

But now comes the rising generation to take the cowboy's place.
Likewise the corn-fed granger, with his bold and cheeky face;
It's on those plains of Texas a lone buffalo hunter does stand
To tell the fate of the cowboy that rode at his right hand.

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Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

Address: Helen Rivers, care The Hollow Tree, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

THE Rogers Lake country and the Buckhorn Spring stretch to the southeast of Mojave and the Tehachapi Pass about twenty-five miles, and to the west of Cottonwood and Barstow and Daggett in the Mojave Desert country of southern California.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: This little neck of the woods, or desert, rather, is way down in the extreme southeastern corner of Kern County, southern California, just an hour's trek southeast of Mojave and not so far west of the Old Trails road and Barstow and Daggett. Here are the Rogers Lake country and Buckhorn Spring—with all the rest of it being mostly desert country out this way. There is some homestead land here, not the best land in the world, I'll admit, but good enough for some one who is looking for a first-class climate for the cure of lung trouble. Any one who is able to work can come out here and manage to keep a grubstake until he gets well. We will be very glad to answer inquiries about this part of Kern County, and give information regarding homestead lands and cabins that are available.

MR. AND MRS. ROSCOE C. SMITH.
Box 22, Muroc, California.

Range girl.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Has any one in the great open West a place and a home for a lonely range-bred girl? I was practically born in the saddle in northwestern Arizona. My father was a small-scale rancher until the war came and took away my brother. Then the old home ranch had to go. I was left alone at the age of nine. All of the saddle stock had gone except my mount Navajo Injun, and kindly neighbors offered us a home, but they were poor and I was a burden, so a year ago I sold my horse and trappings and came to the city. I am so tired of the lights and hurry of the city, and I've been so lonesome here in this world of people. I long for the open range and the restless herd.

I have just turned seventeen and can ride herd on the dogies, cook, and make myself generally useful. Isn't there some place for me on a stock ranch where I can ride my own mount again and help with the cattle? I'm waiting to hear the answer.

RANGE-BRED MARY.
Care of The Tree.

Raymond Rancho.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Seems like young folks are curious about this West. I feel like a sort of old-time authority on much pertaining to all of this Western country, as I've spent many years out here hunting, prospecting, et cetera. I do a lot of hunting—lion hunting particularly—when I'm not at the ranch here. Whenever you folks get ready to drop around to Raymond Rancho, you'll

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get an invitation to a good big venison feed. Just bagged one of the biggest fellows I've ever seen. Yes, I have six to eight guns—all well oiled—and an excellent camping outfit. Any one interested in the outdoor country of the West will find me ready and willing to talk, and folks who want to know about Indian lore will find that I know a few things in that direction, too. I have many trophies, curios, and some Indian pottery. Also, folks, I have much time on my hands, so let's hear from all of you soon.

RAYMOND ROBERT GAREN.
Raymond Rancho, Box 1111, Prescott, Arizona.

Trekking to the Boulder Dam country.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: May a young miner from the mountains of Washington join your happy Gang? Having traveled over thirty-eight States, as well as the Hawaiian Islands—in which I spent over a year—I am prepared to make my yarns as interesting as the average hombre. I would like to hear from some one interested in the Boulder Dam country. I expect to trek for Nevada some time this spring and would like to find some one to pal with while working there.

W. H. NIENABER.
Box 43, Colville, Washington.

Hitch-hiker.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have hitch-hiked across the continent and would like to hear from fellow hikers, the world over. I was born in the western hills of an Eastern State—the Mayflower State—Massachusetts. Anybody wanting to know about our Mayflower State or about hitch-hiking experiences, just drop me a letter. I'm promising to answer every one, folks. STANLEY DYMEK.
2 Bigelow Street, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Rodeo clowning.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:—Make room for "Rodeo Curley"! I used to clown with Two Circle Ranch rodeo from Medora, Billings County, southwestern North Dakota, folks. I've been clowning, singing, and so forth, at fairs and rodeos for some time, folks, although I'm only twenty-two. Maybe some of you folks would like to hear about rodeos in general and about rodeo clowning in particular—about which I can tell considerable. Let's go, folks! M. J. BERGIN.
R. F. D. 1, Centuria, Wisconsin.

Sticks of Idaho.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a young fellow of twenty-one, located back in the sticks of Idaho, and I'd sure like to pick up a Pen Pal or two among the young folks. I've traveled on the Pacific coast from Canada and Mexico, and spent the past year in a little town on the Mexican border. I'd be glad to give any one first-hand information on the Far West. ELMER OLSON.
Box 202, Troy, Idaho.

West of the Old Trails road and the Barstow and Daggett country are Rogers Lake and Buckhorn Spring, in the Mojave Desert of southern California. Wear your friend-maker badges, folks, and write to the folks of the Rogers Lake country if you are looking for homesteads on the edge of the desert lands.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

The horseback trail.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: My home is in Oroville, and although I don't make cross-continental treks by horseback, I take the back trails in the country of the West and can tell you-all something about the magnificence of the great outdoors in northern California and in Oregon. I made the trip from Lakeview, Oregon, to Oroville in Butte County, northern California, in twelve days. There isn't a nicer trail anywhere, folks. I'll be very glad to hear from you-all.

LUCIUS KEAMES.
Box 383, Oroville, California.

Hiawatha land.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've never seen a letter from any one in Hiawatha land, on the shores of "Gitchee Goumee," so I'll proceed to amend a serious mistake. I am from the Kewdraw Peninsula of upper Michigan, and I know that region by heart. People who have seen most of our world say that it is the most beautiful of all places. I'll also be glad to hear from any one interested

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in stamp collecting or view exchanging, as I am starting an exchange club for both. I'll certainly be glad to hear from any one who wants to hear about Hiawatha land.

G. J. MITCHELL, JR.
4800 Eastlawn, Ste. 16, Detroit, Michigan.

"I'm here all alone in Michigan—the land of many lakes. I'm twenty-five, have a smile that never fails, and would love to hear from any Western boys who care to have a good Pen Pal from the land of lakes." This Gangster is Norman Hoffart, Box 335, Muskegon Heights, Michigan.

"Although I'm only eighteen, I'm something of a tramp of the trails. Yes, cowboys, I've been in Denver—spent six years there! Have traveled a lot and have a lot to yarn about. I'm Scot-Irish and French, and good books and music are some of the things I love besides the out-of-doors. Let's hear from you, folks," says Loycean Smith, 1439-A Bard Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

"I hail from central Iowa and my hobby is the study of plant and animal life, although I am interested in outdoor sports. I'm seventeen, and get a big kick out of making new friends, folks." Address your letters to George Gustin, R. F. D. 4, Guthrie Center, Iowa.

"Just wondering if I might be able to get a few Pen Pals through the good old Holla. I am a farmerette, and have lived on a farm all my life. I've often wished I lived on a ranch, or that I could at least visit one. I'd appreciate letters and snapshots from any one, anywhere. I am nineteen, folks." This Sister Gangster is Nezzie Velma Calvitt, Boz 52, Wisner, Louisiana.

"I was born in Canada, but have been to California and points East. I've spent most of my sixteen years out in the open. I've been to military school, and, altogether, have had quite a varied life. I'm now penned up in the city and I would like to have a Pen Pal from the open to swap yarns with," says Mac, Care of The Tree.

"Here is my request, folks: I am a boy twenty years old, and I would like to make friends from all over the world. I have traveled lots over the Southwest and will answer all letters." Leo Hagain's address is 413 West Street, Altus, Oklahoma.

"Buchanan, Iowa, doesn't happen to be on the map, folks, but nevertheless I will get all of your letters, and will waste no time in sending you-all a reply. I am eighteen, and really would like to corral some pals from all over the world. Come on, pals, write to one from good old Iowa," says Miss Wilma Billie Dolge, Buchanan, Cedar County, Iowa.

"Howdy, folks! Any room in your address book for a lonely Caliornia girl's address? If so, please take it down: Katherine McNeely, 1024 Forty-seventh Street, Oakland, California. I've lived in California for nine years, folks. Before that I lived on a ranch in Washington. I'm in my teens, and promise to answer all letters muy pronto."

Hortense Henry, 18203 Jamaica Avenue, Jamaica, New York, is eighteen, and would like to hear from the girls of the Gang who are over eighteen or under twenty-five. She would especially like to hear from ranch girls, for Hortense is a real tenderfoot.

Waneta, Care of The Tree, is a seventeen-year-old Sister of South Carolina. She rides a Kentucky stallion, and is quite a horsewoman, and some time soon hopes to go West, where she can see real ranches and wild West rodeos. She would especially like to hear from the cowgirls of the old Holla.

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WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

By John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

RODEOS, lumbering, and pioneering are the topics that our correspondents are interested in this week. As they are all subjects close to the hearts of good Westerners, we hardly know where to start, but we reckon first place goes to Eric H., of Chicago, Illinois. "I'm interested in the Black Hills Round-up that is held out in Belle Fourche, South Dakota, every summer, Mr. North, and wish you'd give me some information about it. I've never trekked out to a real Western show of this sort, and wish to know if I'd get a view of the real thing there. Just what does the program consist of? I want to see the frontier West in action, so give the honest-to-goodness facts. And I'd like to know how to get there, if it's not asking too much."

We can safely guarantee that Eric won't be disappointed. The Round-up that is held out in Belle Fourche around the first of July is a big Western event, with thrills aplenty for everybody. The events consist of championship bronc riding, bulldogging, calf roping, relay races, steer riding, wild-horse riding, and in fact all the stunts that cowboys and cowgirls take delight in. Here every year the range-land riders, ropers, and bulldoggers gather and compete in the perilous sports of the frontier West. Eric is surely going to get a mighty big thrill as he watches these Westerners match their skill and muscle against a snaky bunch of outlaw horses and longhorn Texas steers.

Hundreds of Indians from the nearby reservations will be on hand, too, dressed up in their picturesque costumes, to compete in the cowboy events and to reënact the war dance once so dreaded by palefaces. Squaw races, buck races, tepee races, and Indian horse races make up a memorable part of the program.

Belle Fourche itself is a mighty fine and interesting Western town. It is located on the C. & N. W. Railroad, and is twelve miles from Spearfish and the Custer Battlefield Highway. This town is also twenty-six miles from Deadwood and the Black and Yellow Trail. The

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North Star Highway passes through Belle Fourche, as do the Black Hills and National Parks Highways.

Eric will find many places of interest in the vicinity, for the Black Hills of South Dakota are hard to beat for scenic beauty and historic interest. We would suggest that he make it a point to see Deadwood, where "Wild Bill" Hickok and "Calamity Jane" are buried; Lead, the site of the largest gold mine in the world; Hot Springs; and Custer. If he'd like to rough it for a spell, he'll find plenty of fine camp grounds available in this region.

"Roughin' it" is sport for some folks, and everyday living for others. To the latter group belongs the lusty lumberjack, who doesn't go in for frills in his woodland quarters. We don't know whether Jake G., of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is experienced at this game or is a tenderfoot, but at any rate he is looking for some information. "Can you tell me if Portland, Oregon, is a big lumbering center, Mr. North? Is there much timber, and are there many mills in its vicinity? What sort of wood is mostly handled? Are there any sawmills in the limits of the city of Portland? I'd be mighty glad if you'd give me all the information you have on this subject."

Portland is the center of the remaining standing timber of the United States, and within a radius of a few hours travel there is approximately seven hundred twenty-one billion feet. Portland is also the largest wholesale distributing point of the Pacific coast. Thirty-three mills, located at distances ranging from thirty to one hundred and fifty miles from Portland, maintain sales offices here in recognition of this city's importance as a lumber port. Sixteen concerns are actively engaged in the export business.

While fir is the predominating variety of lumber handled, Portland is also the pine-distributing center of the Northwest. It is the center of spruce production on the Pacific coast, for although the growth as well as the sawmills are in the coast counties, the sales offices are in Portland. Jake will be interested to hear that there are sixteen sawmills within the corporate limits of the city of Portland, among which is the largest single-unit sawmill in the world. There are also twenty-one mills on the Columbia River between Portland and the sea, and sufficient standing timber in the Willamette Valley alone to keep all the mills now in this valley and in Portland busy for more than one hundred years.

That would seem to assure the success of the lumbering industry out that way for a long time, and the future is what we are all making plans for. Ray G., of Des Moines, is leaving his past behind him in Iowa and trekking out to the Northwest. "What can you tell me of Gem County out in Idaho, Mr. North? Just where is it located and what is the land good for? What's the principal town out that way? I come of pioneer stock and am going to try my luck at carving a future for myself from the land. Gem County has been recommended to me as a fine section for the growing of fruit, and that is what I'm interested in. Any facts that you can give me about that section will be greatly appreciated."

We are mighty glad to oblige Ray. Gem County comprises the Upper Payette River with its tributaries, and is largely an agricultural and wooded section with very little other than usable resources of land and water. The lower section of the county, around Emmett, has an elevation of under four thousand feet, and is especially adapted to fruit culture. Emmett peaches and cherries are famous for their superior quality, and it is claimed by the old-timers out that way that they have never failed to yield a handsome profit to the grower. Many carloads of wonderful apples and

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melons are also shipped annually from Emmett.

Ray may be interested to hear that the Payette Forest Reserve lies partly within the county, supplying cheap lumber and fuel to the settlers. Emmett, with a population of over two thousand, is the county seat and the principal town. The famous "Emmett Bench" land on the slope above the Payette River is practically frost proof; fourteen thousand acres tributary to Emmett are set to fruit. There is good, tillable land on the mountain slopes that cannot be irrigated. Emmett is a famous turkey-growing center.

Land is worth from fifty dollars per acre, upward. Hog raising and dairying rank next to fruit growing as profitable industries. The immense timber resources of the Upper Payette River are opened up and the industry makes a good local market for produce. The Payette National Forest supervisor has his office in Emmett, and the forest reserve, privilege of fuel, building timber, and stock ranges are open to all alike.

At Emmett is located one of the big mills of the section, cutting approximately one hundred million feet of lumber annually. The industry employs a considerable number of men whose purchases make Emmett a far better market for local products than is usual in a city of its size.

Speaking of cities calls to mind the fact that Larry M., of Portland, Maine, is asking some questions about a certain town in British Columbia. "Do you know anything about Kelowna up in British Columbia, Mr. North?" asks this Yankee. "I'm motoring up that way some time soon and would like some information about this particular place in advance, as I might settle down there. Is there a tourist camp where one might stay for a spell while looking around the country? What are the industries? Is there any opportunity for outdoor sports? And lastly, what about the climate?"

Kelowna, located in the midst of a great fruit and vegetable-growing section, is known as "The Orchard City." Yes, Larry will find a fine tourist camp situated in the city park on the sandy shores of a lake suitable for bathing. The camp is fitted with all modern conveniences, and he will find it quite comfortable to settle there while he looks the countryside over. If he is interested in good scenery, he can visit Crawford Falls, about six miles south; Joe Rich Canyon, fifteen miles east; or Gallaghers Canyon, ten miles east and a little south. Black Mountain, from which a splendid view of the valley may be obtained, is due east; the Indians called it "The Place of the Smoothing Stones," as they obtained the flints for their arrows there.

In Kelowna there are four canneries; seven fruit-packing houses; six sawmills; a sash and door factory; a box factory; a brick yard; aërated waterworks; a boat-building yard; many good stores; three banks; and two excellent hotels.

Larry will find plenty of opportunity for outdoor sports, including swimming, golf, and tennis. The city is ideally situated on the Okanagan Lake, which has a tempering effect on the climate. There is not space here to say more, but we are telling Larry in a letter where he can procure additional information, and will be glad to send any other hombre who is interested the same address.

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MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

Address all communications to Missing Department, DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

McCRACHEN, FANNY.—Last heard from in Parkhead, Scotland, sixteen years ago. You lived on John Street, Dunoon, Scotland, and your mother treated my foot when I got a rusted nail in it. Please write to Gavin Marshall, Quaker Hill, Connecticut.

NICHOLS, HARLIE.—Thirty-two years old. Five feet nine inches tall, dark hair, and gray eyes. Last heard from in Oakland, California, in April, 1923. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Alice Nichols, R. F. D. 2, Elizabethtown, Kentucky.

McGHEE, WILLIAM C.—Six feet tall, weighs about one hundred and eighty pounds. Last heard from in Careyville, Tennessee. A coal miner. Information appreciated by his brother, Ernest B. McGhee, 170 Sallonstall Street, Canandaigua, New York.

DE SOKOLOFF, NICOLAS.—Retired in 1911, and resided for a time at 10 Quai de L'Amirante, St. Petersburg, Russia. Would like to hear from any of his descendants. Address Carlos F. Bennett, 243 Magnolia Avenue, Long Beach, California.

OHMSTEAD, CHARLEY.—Love you, no matter what you have done. Cannot forget you. Please write to Tootsy, care of this magazine.

BENNETT, LeROY.—Son of Amos and Margaret McCurry Bennett, of North Carolina. About thirty-five years old. Six feet tall, dark hair and brown eyes. Last heard from nineteen years ago. Please write to your sister, Isabelle B., care of this magazine.

PETOCK, MARY.—No matter where you are, or what you have done, please come home or write to your mother, Mrs. Kate Petock, 273 Jessamine Avenue, Yonkers, New York.

HONEY, L. J. D.—Don't make me suffer any more. We all love you. Please come home or write to Mother, care of this magazine.

COOK, G. C.—I want to explain. I am still with sister. Please write to Mrs. G. C. Cook, care of this magazine.

NOTICE.—Some time in January, 1888, a two-weeks-old baby girl was left at a doctor's office in Indianapolis, Indiana. She was taken to the Orphan Asylum, Sixteenth Street and College Avenue, in Indianapolis, and was later adopted from there. She is now looking for her parents. Information appreciated by Mrs. Hazel Stegall, 3922 West Seventh Street, Fort Worth, Texas.

D. L. P.—You are forgiven. Have settled with Cork and Bond. Please write to H. P., care of this magazine.

SON.—There has been no news. Trust you to keep the promise made to me in the maize field. Please write to Mamma, care of this magazine.

DEFFENBAUGH, CLIFFORD TROUPE.—Have always felt that there was a mistake in the report of your accidental death. Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

HOLCOMB, MARSHALL.—Twenty-six years old. Five feet eight inches tall, red hair, blue eyes, and light complexion. Disappeared in the fall of 1927. Has a diagonal scar on left forearm, about four inches long. Information appreciated by his brother, G. D. H., care of this magazine.

SMITH, ORVILLE D.—Twenty-six years old. Was employed near Dean Lake, Ontario, in 1928. Information appreciated by G. L., care of this magazine.

VIOLET.—Please forgive everything and write to Mother, care of this magazine.

AMAS, PANSY.—Unforeseen things have happened. Please write to Tawny, same address, or care of this magazine.

WILLIAMS, MRS. BELLE.—Last seen in 1917. Her two sons were placed in an orphans' home on St. Simons Island, Georgia. Please write to Sons, care of this magazine.

ARCHIBALD, THOMAS.—Sailed from Glasgow, Scotland, April 4, 1924, on the S. S. "Mayburn." Left the ship at Montreal, and later went to the United States. Worked in a garage in New York City, and lived at 767 Amsterdam Avenue, New York; then moved to 120 West Ninety-seventh Street. After this he went to Ellenwood, New Jersey, and worked on a farm. Returned to Musselburgh, Scotland, in November, 1926. Came back to New York, and has not been heard from since. Information appreciated by Wife, care of this magazine.

WALKER, JAMES or MORRIS BARRETT.—Married Charlotte Ostrander, in 1925, and left her in 1926. Last seen in Brooklyn, New York. Have important news for him. Information appreciated by William Swords, 6510 Evans Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

WILSON.—Come back, and we will forget the past and make a new start. Please write to Connie, care of this magazine.

HOLLINGSWORTH, LEE.—Drove a cab in Los Angeles, California, in 1926-27-28. Please write to your pal, Nat, Box 73, Denison, Iowa.

MR. ECK.—Do you remember the girl at Clifton, Arizona, in April? Please write to Clifton Girl, care of this magazine.

ROBERTSON, A. C.—Tall and blond. Lived in Little Field, and in Texhoma, Texas. Was in Turlock, California, at one time. Information appreciated by Etha Walker, 173 Angelus Street, Turlock, California.

KNOX.—My father, William Victor Knox, died in 1908. Had blue eyes and dark-brown hair. Lived in Tyler, Texarkana, and Dallas, Texas. Would like to hear from his people, whom I believe to be in Canada, Ireland, and St. Louis, Missouri. Information appreciated by daughter, Evelyn, care of this magazine.

VIRGIL.—All is forgiven. Do not be afraid. Baby Jay wants his Pal. We are at the same place. Please come home or write to mother, Mrs. Blanche Downer, Route 1, Box 43, Avondale, Colorado.

NILES, MARY.—I was born October 24, 1888, and was left at the Orphans' Home, 175 East Sixty-eighth Street, New York City, November 9, 1888. Would like to hear from my people. Please write to W. A., care of this magazine.

ASHFORD, JACK.—Married Jean Dickson, of Paterson, New Jersey. Information appreciated by his wife's sister, Jessie Dickson, care of this magazine.

DREW, MRS. ALFRED.—Left Galt, Canada, five years ago. Believed to be in California. Information appreciated by her brother, Matthew Hogsden, 4 Eastbourne Road, Remuera, Auckland, New Zealand.

DAVIES, JOHN P.—We are holding a letter for you at this office. Please send for it. Address Lenore, care of this magazine.

DELOREY, EDWARD F.—We are holding a letter for you at this office. Please send for it. Address Anna, care of this magazine.

FRANKLIN.—We are holding a letter at this office for you. Please send for it. Address J. E. C., care of this magazine.

MICHAELANGELO.—Please send for letter from Angelo, held for you at this office.

MIDNIGHT BLACKIE, or R. M.—We are holding a letter at this office for you. Please send for it. Address G. L., care of this magazine.

MURPHY, HARRY ISOM.—We are holding a letter for you at this office. Please send for it. Address Ethel, care of this magazine.

McANDERSON, JACK.—We are holding a letter from Paul for you at this office. Please send for it.

McCANN, JOSEPH.—Please send for letter from Mildred, held for you at this office.

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BUCK, RUPERT E.—Five feet six inches tall, blond hair, and weighs about one hundred and eighty-five pounds. Formerly of 6444 Maryland Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. Lived for some time in Urbana, Ohio. Information appreciated by his wife and son, Mrs. Rupert E. Buck, 6102 Eberhart Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

O'DONNELL, HENRY.—Formerly of South Bend, Indiana. Last heard from in Oakland, California. Information appreciated by John A. Gaydoes, 5125 Kenmore Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

POE, EVERETT FRANCIS.—Formerly of Birmingham, Alabama. Last heard from in Kalamazoo, Michigan. I am in the same old place, and very anxious to hear from you. Please write to Dixie, care of this magazine.

KYLER, DOROTHY.—Last known address was, in September, 1927, Haddon Avenue, Camden, New Jersey. Information appreciated by Marie, care of this magazine.

ADAMS, JACK.—In July, 1924, was in training at Camp Dix, New Jersey. Information appreciated by Marie, care of this magazine.

NOTICE.—Would like to hear from any of the friends of Al Capone, formerly of Chicago, Illinois. Please write to R. O. Brewer, 502 Highland Avenue, Johnson City, Tennessee.

THOMAS, MRS. JOHN E., nee ELEANOR H. BUNTEN.—Left home, in Fairfield, Connecticut, in August, 1927. Information appreciated by her son, H. E. Thomas, St. Benson Road, Fairfield, Connecticut.

HALL, FRANK.—Builds swimming pools. Information appreciated by an old friend, A. B. C., care of this magazine.

HANLEY, JOHN.—Do you remember the girl who called you "Butcher Boy," in Canton, Ohio, and the McKinley Theater, in the West End, about eight years ago? You used to live at 115 Seventh Street, South West. Am sick. Please write to Dorothy 5, care of this magazine.

OWENS, or HOLMES, ROBERT H.—His parents were divorced and he was adopted by L. A. Owens, of Comstock Park, Michigan. Joined the navy and was on the U. S. S. "New Mexico." His brother, to whom he wrote for some time, is worrying about him. Information appreciated by Fred Wheeler, 364 Carr Street, Jackson, Michigan.

DRINKWARD.—I am twenty-seven years old. Had several brothers and sisters. Was adopted when I was about four years old. Information appreciated by L. W. E., care of this magazine.

MAXWELL, RALPH T.—Forty-eight years old. Separated from his wife, Naomie B. Case, when his daughter, Laura Bernice Maxwell, was about four years old. Information appreciated by Laura Bernice Parsons, Route 1, Willamina, Oregon.

LITYENBURGH, BILLIE.—Of Canton, Ohio. Left home in March, 1929. Mother is very ill and wants to see you. Please write to your brother, Jim, 1608 Eleventh Street, Canton, Ohio.

KEFFER, J. B.—Waiting. Still love you. Why don't you write to Elizabeth, care of this magazine?

BELCHER, EZRA.—Sixty-five years old. Gray eyes. Last heard from in Washington, D. C., in 1909, when he was discharged from a hospital in that city. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Effie Ficklin, Petersburgh, Indiana.

SMITH, W. H.—Forty-five years old. Six feet tall, weighed about one hundred and eighty-five pounds, dark-brown hair, gray eyes, and fair complexion. Left home, in Arnett, Oklahoma, in November, 1929. A letter is being held at this office for him. Please write to Wife, care of this magazine.

EDWARDSON, LEIF HJALMAR.—Wrote to your old address in June, 1928. The letter was returned in September, 1929. Please write to Sverre Edwardson, care of C. N. R. Boarding Car Department, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

HOLMER, THORLIEF FREDRIKSEN.—Wrote to your old address in May, 1928. Please write to Sverre Edwardson, care of C. N. R. Boarding Car Department, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

DACHITE, ARTHUR.—Last heard from in Fairberry, Nebraska. Information appreciated by his sister, Margaret, care of this magazine.

VERNE.—Last heard from in the Naval Hospital, San Francisco, California. Please write to Nurse Florence, care of this magazine.

NOTICE.—My parents' name is Grubbs; I am twenty-three years old, and was adopted by Mrs. F. B. Fowler. Information concerning my people will be appreciated by J. H. Fowler, care of this magazine.

THOMPSON, ELEANOR.—Have tried to get in touch with you several times in the last few years. Please write to Theo, care of this magazine.

POWERS, OTIS.—Last heard from in California. A painter. Blue eyes and black hair. Left North Carolina in 1919. Information appreciated by a friend, B. D. M., care of this magazine.

HARDING, FRED.—Lived in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, in 1920. Forty-seven years old. Brown hair and eyes. Believed to have gone to Nevada. Information appreciated by B. D. M., care of this magazine.

NAYLOR, CARL W.—Thirty-nine years old. Brown eyes and auburn hair. Lived in DeQuincy, Louisiana, in 1927. May have gone to California. Information appreciated by B. D. M., care of this magazine.

BRADLEY, WALTER S.—Gray eyes and black, curly hair. Lived in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, in 1919. Last heard from in Macy, Nebraska, in 1920. Information appreciated by B. D. M., care of this magazine.

SCHIMNOWSKI, WILLIAM.—Lived at one time in Gretna, Montana. Later lived in Cleveland, Ohio. Information appreciated by his brother John's daughter, Hulda Schimnowski, Neche, North Dakota.

HUSTEAD, CECIL.—Left Selah, Washington, about seventeen years ago. Information appreciated by his father, Walter Hustead, Route 1, Selah, Washington.

BREMER, BERT.—Twenty-four years old. Light hair, gray eyes, dark complexion, and weighs about one hundred and fifteen pounds. Left home eight years ago. Last heard from six years ago. Information appreciated by his mother, Mary Beischling, 1523 North D Street, St. Louis, Missouri.

JOHNSTON, JAMES.—Native of Bosbrook, County Down, Ireland. Was employed there in a weaving factory. Left for America when a young man. Last heard from about twenty-four years ago, in Newark, New Jersey. Information appreciated by Mrs. David Johnston, Box 733, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada.

SMITH, LENA.—Native of Derry, Ireland. Her father was a coach builder, and they lived on Grosvenor Road, Belfast. She left there about thirty years ago for New York City. Her friends, Mary and Sarah Currie, formerly of Belfast, Ireland, would like to hear from her. Address Mrs. C. M. Barnes, Box 733, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada.

KERR, JACK.—Formerly of Belfast, Ireland. Lived for some time in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Visited his home in Belfast about 1906. Last seen in Vancouver, British Columbia, about nine years ago. Believed to be somewhere in the United States. His cousins, Mary and Sarah Currie, would like to hear from him. Address Mrs. C. M. Barnes, Box 733, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada.

CROWN, CHARLES A.—Last heard from in Arizona, in 1924. Have news for him. Information appreciated by his niece, V. C. DeGraff, 278 Goundry Street, North Tonawanda, New York.

BARNEY.—You told me last June not to write until I heard from you. I still love you and am waiting. Please write to Dot, care of this magazine.

ROBINSON, PRESTON.—Last heard from in Rutherfordton, North Carolina. Was adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Weathers. Information appreciated by Mrs. Lillian Olson, 236 East Broadway, Butte, Montana.

BRICK, MRS. JOHN P., nee CHRISTINE WOOD, and son, ANTHONY.—Last known address was 111 Pleasant Street, Northampton, Massachusetts. Information appreciated by E. A. Wood, R. F. D. 3, Snohomish, Washington.

BAXTER, JUSTIN.—Last heard from in Seattle, Washington. Believed to have gone to the Klondike, in 1910 or 1911. Information appreciated by his nephew, Charles E. Baxter, Box 37, Guild, New Hampshire.

ROBERTSON, LOUIS F.—Left New Britain, Connecticut, in August, 1929. Mother and Frank would like to hear from you. Please write to Mrs. Anna L. Robertson, 338 Main Street, New Britain, Connecticut.

ANDERSON, W.—Last heard from in Dallas, Texas. Please write to N. Sura Vitz, Box 1291, Waco, Texas.

WILLIAMS, ELMER CHARLES.—Twenty-six years old. Last heard from in Lewiston, Idaho, about three years ago. Information appreciated by his brother, Earl B. Williams, Olinda, California.

MILLS, ROY LEE.—Dark hair and eyes. Last heard from in Chattanooga, Tennessee, about a year ago. Formerly of Cincinnati, Ohio. Information appreciated by A. B. S., care of this magazine.

REEVES, MRS. GLADYS, nee KING.—Twenty-three years old. Five feet six inches tall, fair hair and complexion. When last heard from was rooming with a girl named Jewell, at 2509 Treest. Avenue, Kansas City, Missouri. Had one daughter, Ima Gean. Information appreciated by C. A. Baeza, 365 Greenwood Road, Sharon Hill, Pennsylvania.

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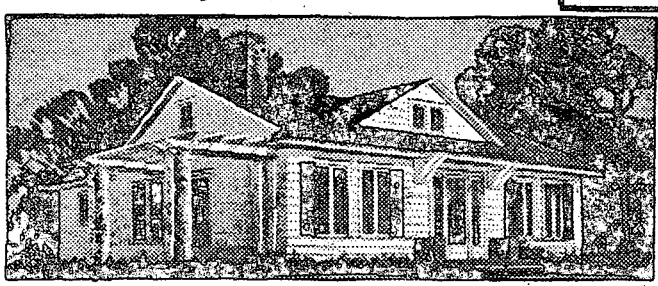
Name This House

$500.00 GIVEN!

We Will Pay $500.00 Cash For the Most Suitable Name For This Beautiful Six-Room House



ANY NAME MAY WIN!

Offer open to everybody. Nothing to buy or sell. No Obligation.

WHOEVER SENDS THE MOST SUITABLE NAME WILL WIN $500.00—NOTHING ELSE TO DO!

This is a new Colonial Bungalow—cozy, convenient—yet a roomy house. It is meeting with such popularity that we are desirous of obtaining a suitable name for it for use in connection with our building program, and will pay $500.00 cash for the most suitable name suggested. There are no strings tied to this offer. Sending us a name for this house does not obligate you in any way. Nothing to buy or sell. We merely want a suitable name and are willing to pay $500 in cash for the best one sent in.

ANY NAME MAY WIN

Surely you can think of an appropriate name for such a beautiful home. Do not use more than two words. Any word or words may be used or any combination of words, such as Ridgelawn, Shadynook, Hearthome, or names like Sunshine Inn, Journey's End, etc. No matter how simple your suggestion is, you cannot afford to neglect sending it in at once. Any name may win. Possibly you may have the most suitable name right on the end of your tongue this minute. If you have, send it in at once, and $500 in cash is yours.

$100.00 Extra for Promptness

We want the name for this house quickly, and are going to pay the winner an extra $100.00 cash just for promptness—or a total of $600.00 in all. See coupon below. Send your suggestion today!

FOLLOW THESE RULES

This offer is open to everyone, excepting members of this firm, its employees and relatives. Each participant may send only one name. Sending two or more names will cause all names submitted by that person to be thrown out. Contest closes June 28, 1930. Should two or more persons submit an equally suitable name for this house, the full amount of the prize offered will be paid to each one so tying. To win the $100.00 CASH PROMPTNESS PRIZE, the winning name must be mailed within three (3) days after this announcement is read. This $100.00 CASH PROMPTNESS PRIZE will be added to the $500.00 prize and paid to each one submitting the winning name, provided suggestion is mailed within three (3) days after this announcement is read. See coupon—act quick!

FREE! In appreciation of your suggesting a name for this house real quickly, we will send you FREE and POSTPAID, the floor plans and blue print of this beautiful house. Understand, this does not obligate you in any way. Fill out and mail the coupon or a copy TODAY—QUICK! ANY NAME MAY WIN.

HOME BUILDERS' SOCIETY
1293 Lincoln Way, Batavia, Illinois

Enclosed with this coupon on separate sheet is my suggestion for a name.

Date this offer was read.....

Date my suggestion is mailed.....

My Name .....

Address .....

Town .....

State .....

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BUICK 4 door SEDAN!

5 CARS GIVEN!

Every year we spend over $150,000.00 on prize offers to advertise our business. In this new offer, 150 Grand Prizes totaling $6555.00 will be given to the fortunate ones who solve our puzzle and win. Here it is—

FIND THE "DIFFERENT" AUTO

The 16 cars in circle all look alike. 15 of them are exactly alike—but one is different from the rest. Find this "different" car if you can—and mark it. The difference may be in fenders, bumper, name plate, radiator or top. Careful—don't let this puzzle stump you, because winner must solve puzzle correctly first in order to

WIN BUICK SEDAN OR $2000.00 CASH

Winner has choice of Buick Sedan or cash if preferred. No more puzzles to solve. Duplicate prizes in case of ties. *All actively interested who have answered correctly will receive prizes or cash compensations.* Nothing to buy, now, later or ever, so send no money.

$705.00 For Promptness—Don't delay! Solve puzzle correctly and receive Certificate good for $705.00 if you are prompt and win first prize, making total prize $2000.00. Any man, woman, boy, or girl in U. S. A., outside of Chicago, may submit an answer. 150 of the people who take up this offer are going to win these splendid prizes. Be one of them. Send number of "different" auto in letter or postcard today. But act promptly!

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504 North Dearborn Street
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Send No Money! Reply to-day!

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No human being can escape the harmful effects of tobacco. Don't try to quit without assistance. Let our simple inexpensive remedy help you. A complete treatment costs but $2.00. Every penny promptly refunded if you do not get desired results.

Ours is a harmless preparation, carefully compounded to overcome the condition, that will make quitting of tobacco pleasant, and easy. It comes with a money back guarantee.

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Improve your appearance with the Anita Nose Adjuster. Shapes flesh and cartilage—quickly, safely and painlessly, while you sleep. Results are lasting. Doctors praise it. 68,000 users. Write for 30 Day TRIAL OFFER and FREE BOOKLET.

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—clings closely to the body without straps, buckles or springs. Easy to apply, comfortable, inexpensive.

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For almost a quarter century stacks of sworn testimonials from many different countries report success—without delay from work. The epidermatic absorption of Plapao utilizing "mechanico-chemico" therapy tends toward a natural process of recovery, *after which no further use for a truss.*

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FREE TEST COUPON

PLAPAO LABORATORIES, 220 Stuart Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

Send me a FREE 10 day test supply of the remedial factor Plapao and 48-page illustrated book on Rupture; no charge for this now or later.

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Has No Cough Now; Asthma Disappeared

Death Seemed Certain. Quickly Found Lasting Relief.

Despairing sufferers from asthma and bronchial cough, will be glad to read this from Mrs. Myrtle Willett, 5900 Maxwell Ave., Detroit, Mich.:

"I had bronchial asthma 2 years. I couldn't lie down and slept only 3 hours a night. I was so near death, I thought every night would be my last. After taking half a bottle of Nacor I began to sleep, and improve. My cough soon disappeared, and my strength returned. Now I do not choke or cough at all, and feel perfectly well."

Hundreds of people who suffered for years from asthma and bronchial coughs, state that their trouble left and has not returned. Their letters and a booklet of vital information will be sent free by Nacor Medicine Co., 773 State Life Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind. Write for this free information, and find out how thousands have found lasting relief.

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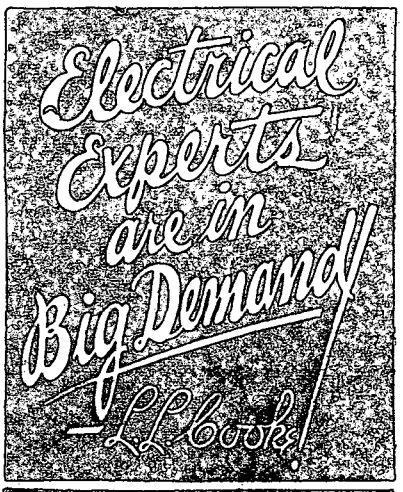

I Will Train You at Home to fill a Big-Pay Job!

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Chief Engineer

It's a shame for you to earn $15 or $20 or $30 a week, when in the same six days as an Electrical Expert so many men are earning $60 to $100, do it easier, and don't work half so hard. Why then should you remain in the small-pay game, in a line of work that offers no chance, no big promotion, no big income? Fit yourself for a real job in the great electrical industry. I'll show you how.

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Makes $700 in 24 Days in Radio

"Thanks to your interesting Course I made over $700 in 24 days in Radio. Of course, this is a little above the average but I run from $10 to $40 clear profit every day; you can see what your training has done for me."
FRED G. McNABB,
848 Spring St., Atlanta, Ga.

$70 to $80 a Week for Jacquot

"Now I am specializing in autoelectricity and battery work and make from $70 to $80 a week and am just getting started. I don't believe there is another school in the world like yours. Your lessons are a real joy to study."
ROBERT JACQUOT,
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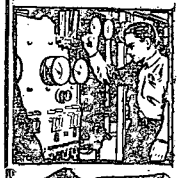
Colorado Springs, Colo.

$20 a Day for Schreck

"Use my name as a reference and depend on me as a booster. The biggest thing I ever did was answer your advertisement. I am averaging better than $500 a month from my own business now. I used to make $18 a week."
A. SCHRECK,
Phoenix, Ariz.



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"When I began with you I was just a common laborer, going from one job to another, working for anything I could get and that wasn't much. Now my salary is $3,500 a year and the Company furnishes me with an automobile."
C. BECKETT,
108 Maple Heights,
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LEARN TO BE AN ELECTRICAL EXPERT

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Today even the ordinary Electrician—the "screw driver" kind—is making money—big money. But it's the trained man—the man who knows the whys and wherefores of Electricity—the Electrical Expert—who is picked out to "boss" the ordinary Electricians—to boss the Big Jobs—the jobs that pay $60 to $100 a week. Work up to one of these "Big Jobs." Start by enrolling now for my easily learned, quickly grasped, right-up-to-the-minute, Spare-Time Home-Study Course in Practical Electricity.

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You don't have to be a College Man; you don't have to be a High School Graduate. I know exactly the kind of training you need and I will give you that training. My Course in Electricity is simple, thorough and complete and offers every man, regardless of age, education or previous experience, the chance to become, in a very short time, an "Electrical Expert," and go to the top through quick promotion.

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With me, you do practical work—at home. You start right in after your first few lessons to work at your profession in the regular way and make extra money in your spare time. For this you need tools, and I give them to you—5 big, complete working outfits, with tools, measuring instruments and a real electric motor.

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So sure am I that you can learn Electricity—so sure am I that after studying with me, you, too, can get into the "big money" class in Electrical work, that I will agree in writing to return every single penny paid me in tuition, if, when you have finished my Course, you are not satisfied it was the best investment you ever made.

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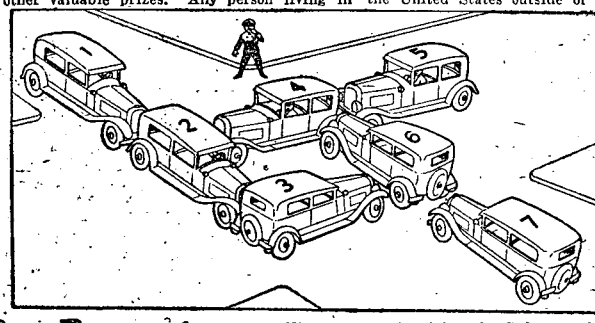
Seven Brand New 6-Cylinder Cars Given

For advertising purposes I am going to give absolutely free a brand new six-cylinder "Special Six" Nash four-door Sedan, an Oldsmobile two-door Sedan, a De Soto two-door Sedan, a Pontiac two-door Sedan, an Essex two-door Sedan, a Whippet two-door Sedan, and a Chevrolet two-door Sedan, all six-cylinder latest model Sedans; also 4 splendid new console type radios, a Victor Orthophonic Victrola and other valuable prizes. Any person living in the United States outside of Chicago may enter an answer to this puzzle except employees of the W. D. Boyce Company or members of their families, or winners of automobiles or first prizes in any of our previous offers, or members of their families.

Solve This Traffic Puzzle

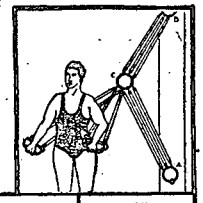


In the picture there are 7 cars in a bad traffic jam. None of them can move forward, for each car is blocked by the one in front of it. One of these cars will have to be backed out. Which one? The traffic policeman seems to be stumped. Can you straighten up this tangle for him? Only one car may be moved backward, and if you pick out the right one, you will see that it is not necessary to back up any of the others. Send the number of the car which when backed out will relieve this traffic tie-up, and if your answer is correct you will be qualified for this opportunity.

$500.00 for Promptness We are not only giving the Sedans, radios and so forth in our big prize list amounting to over $6,800.00, but are also giving an additional $500.00 in cash for promptness to the winner of first prize if he or she has been prompt. Thus, the first prize winner will receive the Nash Sedan and $500.00 in cash, or $1,845.00. Find the car which when backed out will relieve this traffic tangle and send the number of it in a letter or on a post card, or you can mark the car on the picture and send it to me. Be sure to write or print your name and address plainly. All who answer correctly can share in the prizes or cash. Duplicate prizes paid in case of ties. ANSWER TODAY. **FREE PRIZE JUDGE, Dept. 546, 510 N. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.**

BIG MUSCLES For Only $3.98

REGULAR VALUE $15



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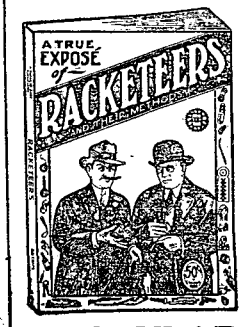

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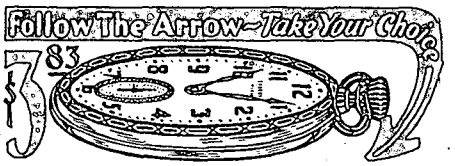

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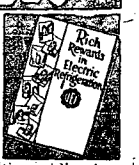

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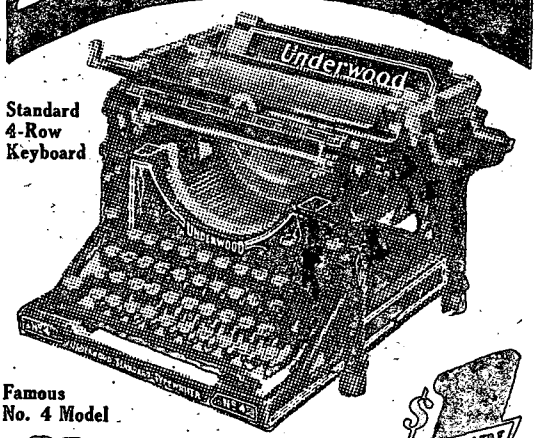

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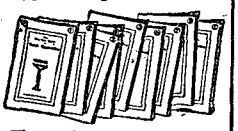

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Send special offer coupon below for 10 days' Free Trial—if you decide to keep the machine at my rock-bottom price, pay only $3. a month until the bargain price of only $44.90 (term price) is paid.

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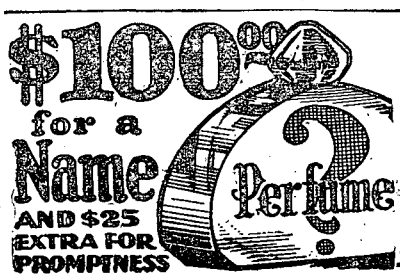

Any Simple Name May Win

We want a name for our exquisite perfume and we will pay you $125 if you suggest the one selected. Even a name you don't think much of may win. A simple name has as much chance as any other.

Hints: It may be a single word or more than one word. A "coined" word, the name of a flower, like Rose. The name of a place, a Movie Star or any person. Names are almost unlimited. It costs nothing to submit a name. Someone wins $125 for a few moments thought—why not you?

Send only one suggestion. If anyone submits more than one name all names sent by that person will be disqualified. The name found most suitable will receive $100 cash. If you send the winning name within 3 days after reading this announcement you get $25 extra for promptness. Contest closes April 30, 1930, and in case of ties duplicate prizes will be awarded.

We want to hear from you at once. Send your suggestion on any kind of paper. Neatness does not count. No obligation. Nothing else to do. You may win $125.

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Win $2,000.00

Send Name for This New Magazine. Learn How to Win $2,000.00 and Get $1.00 Worth of Luxurious Toilet Articles, at Once, Absolutely FREE

Send Any Simple Name

The plainest or simplest kind of a name may win. Use one, two or three words separately or combined. "Really Beautiful" or "Beauty and Happiness" are suggestions. Send the name you think of and send it right away, as the best name is often the one that flashes through your mind.

Win $1,000.00 Here is the magazine to name. A new magazine for the development of personality, happiness and wholesome beauty. Some people develop a gracious manner and countenance, radiate with beauty by helping others. Personality—Manner—Poise—Wholesomeness—How to improve Your Happiness—The Latest in Hair Dress, Cosmetics, Perfume and beauty aids.

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No matter who you are or where you live you have as good a chance to win as anyone. **We will give more than $3,000.00 in twenty cash prizes and send more than 10,000 Luxurious Toilet Articles absolutely FREE.** Payment of these prizes and fulfillment of this promise is guaranteed by a responsible, reliable firm. Send your suggestion for a name right away and we will send you full information how to get a wonderful package of Toilet Goods from which you can select $1.00 worth absolutely FREE, $3.00 worth to be kept by you on our easy plan, or returned if you desire.

Send Name At Once And I'll send you full information, give you three-fourths of the necessary credits to win $1,000.00 and tell you how to get $1.00 worth of Toilet Articles absolutely FREE. Follow these simple rules:

1. **Send only one name for only one name from each family will count.**
2. **This offer not good outside of the United States proper or in Des Moines. Employees or relatives of employees of this Company are not permitted to compete, nor children under 15 years of age.**
3. **Duplicate prizes paid in case of ties.**

Someone who sends a name will win $1,000.00, if prompt an additional $1,000.00 making $2,000.00 in all. How can you win $2,000.00 more easily? $2,000.00 all your own to spend as you like? It may mean independence, it surely means a snug fortune. Our plan is simple and easy. Send name today. Do it right away.

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Send NO money

Bargain Introductory SALE!

READ IT! Folks said I'd lose money at this price—SOLID gold effect genuine Bradley Bulldog—guaranteed by 100 year old, million dollar Factory: Only **$3.75** and postage—the lowest price in history! But I'm willing to lose money if necessary to get you to wear, depend on, and enjoy this splendid new Bradley Watch. You'll be so delighted with its accuracy! Your friends will be astonished at its beauty! Of course I'll make my profit out of the repeat orders from your friends. **Think of it**—SOLID gold effect case, **GUARANTEED 25 YEARS,** richly engraved—it is beautiful! ACCURACY guaranteed by million dollar Factory—100 years of success back of this handsome new watch! *1930 MODEL.*

SEND NO MONEY Pay **$3.75** and postage when your watch arrives. Nothing more to pay.

FREE Genuine Waldemar Chain and Knife to match if you order TODAY. MONEY BACK IF NOT DELIGHTED—You risk nothing!

COUPON—MAIL THIS OR POSTAL CARD

BRADLEY, Building H-251, NEWTON, MASS.

Rush my Watch, Knife and Chain. Will pay $3.75 and postage on arrival. Nothing more to pay and my money back if I am not delighted. I RISK NOTHING.

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Your radio course has enabled me to earn over $500 in two months. This is all spare time work, as I have a permanent position with my father in our store. I give you all the credit for the above.
—J. NOFFSINGER,
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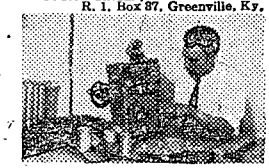

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Men, here's the most remark ble money maker of the age! A little automatic machine that makes old-style can openers obsolete! Now, just a twist of the wrist makes the dollars hum for you! So mail the coupon today for liberal FREE TEST OFFER!

$7 to $10 In An Hour Just Showing This $1,000,000 Can Opening Machine

NO more awkward stabbing and hacking with old-style can openers! No more danger of blood poisoning from gashed and lacerated fingers! For now a remarkable new invention banishes every old-style can opener to the scrap heap. Now a simple twist of the wrist opens any can in a couple of seconds. No wonder they all simply go wild over it! No wonder salesmen often sell to every house in the block and make from $7 to $10 in an hour!

Works Like a Charm

This queer little device doesn't just chop a ragged hole in the top of the can. It cuts the entire top completely out, clean as a whistle! The machine takes hold of the can—opens it—flips up the lid so you can grab it—and gives it back without any sharp edges to snag your fingers. You just put the can in the machine—turn the handle—and almost instantly the job is done!

Sells Itself in 10 Seconds

Everyone knows how women detest the dangerous old style can opener. Imagine, then, how they welcome this startling *new* method—this *automatic* way of doing their most distasteful kitchen task. Men, honestly I'm not exaggerating one bit when I tell you that not ten words are necessary to sell any of them! All you do is hand your demonstrator to your prospect and let her try it! She sells herself in ten seconds by the clock—and you pocket a nice, fat profit! Yes, really, it's just that simple and easy! That's why $75 to $150 in a week is easy almost anywhere.

Opens Any Can in a Jiffy

You just fasten the can in the holder and turn the handle. Nothing complicated, nothing to get out of order. Opens any can, square, round or oval, in a few seconds. And, men, IT'S TRIPLE PATENTED, so there is no competition.

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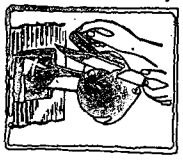

Works like magic. Puts a razor edge on any knife or tool in a few seconds. Anyone can use it. Sharpens scissors too. The coupon brings full details.

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"Here is my record for first 30 days with Speedo: — June 13, 60 Speedos; June 20, 84 Speedos; June 30, 192 Speedos; July 6, 288 Speedos. Speedo sells to 9 out of 10 prospects."
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SPARE TIME—$9 First Half Day

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PART TIME — $20 in 3 Hours

"I worked about three hours and took 25 orders. This is certainly a money-maker."
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Central States Manufacturing Co.,
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Rush me facts and details of your Free Test offer.

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Town ..... State .....

( ) Check here if interested only in one for your own home.

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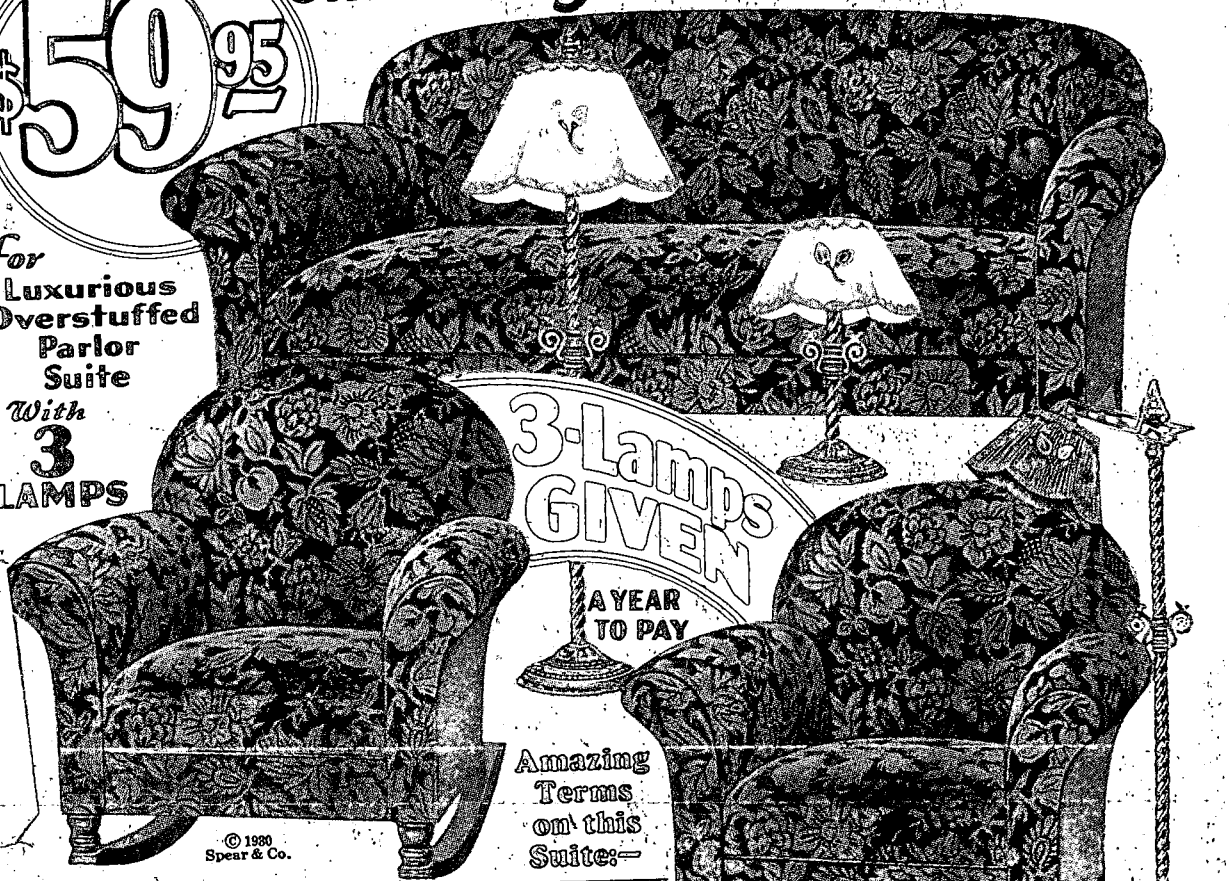
ONLY $59.95

For Luxurious Overstuffed Parlor Suite With 3 LAMPS



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PAY NOTHING MORE for 2 MONTHS

30 Days FREE Trial

Smashing the price down to $59.95—Slashing production costs to save Spear friends 30%—GIVING AWAY 3 beautiful lamps in addition—Spear challenges the whole country to beat this Biggest of all Bargains . . . this beautiful, luxurious, new style, 3-piece Overstuffed Velour Suite.

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